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MY OFFICIAL HUSBAND.

A Novel of To-Day.

By MRS. J. F. REICHHARD,

Author of "A Woman's Revenge," "Mr. Clifton of Barrington," Etc.

NEW YORK :
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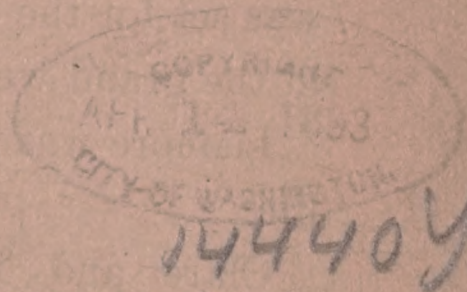
OR THE

MYSTERY OF HILLIARD HALL.

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MY OFFICIAL HUSBAND.

CHAPTER I.

“PLEASE take a seat, Ryle, I wish to talk with you, that is why I sent for you,” said Ryle Hilliard’s father, as that young man entered his father’s library.

“Thank you, father, I would rather stand. I shall be off directly to the woods ; I rather anticipate some good sport to-day.”

“Be seated, Ryle,” exclaimed Mr. Randle Hilliard, gravely. “I have much to say to you ; and confess, when last night I expressed a wish to confer with you upon a matter of some importance, I did not expect you would enter my presence in such a state as this. It is conduct which might be anticipated from the ill-bred son of a vulgar farmer, but emanating from a gentleman’s son——”

“Spare me, father, I mean no disrespect ! but let me away to the woods ; Jasper Letton is waiting for me.”

“It is of Jasper Letton I would speak,” exclaimed

Mr. Hilliard sternly, and added: "Be seated, for I repeat to you that it is on a matter of importance that I would address you. Ryle, it is not to see Jasper, or to kill birds, that you wander so frequently in the woods."

"Perhaps, father, you will honor me so far as to tell me with what other object I stroll in the woods, and further, if the sport be not my purpose, why I masquerade in this fashion?" He pointed to his shooting dress as he spoke.

"I will inform you, Ryle, for I am in possession of your secret."

"My secret! Really, there is a jest somewhere, and I am dull enough not to see it."

"I will enlighten you. Jasper Letton, my superintendent—superintendent of my estate—has a daughter."

"Well, father."

"Pretty, attractive, alluring, and artful no doubt."

"Father—my father! he would need have a care for his life who, without your immunity from my wrath, should utter such words in my hearing, against one who deserves no such imputation."

"You are warm, young man."

"Not one moment too soon, when called upon to defend the character of one dear to me, from base imputations."

"Dear to you?" shouted the old man in a voice thunder.

"Dear to me!" repeated Ryle, and added passionately, "Are those not words of propriety? Does my honorable position as a wealthy gentleman's son and one of society's lights require that I should belie myself? Am I, in order to be the worthy son of one of the leaders of society's 'Four Hundred,' to become a thing I now scorn?"

"Ryle Hilliard," cried the old man, rising in a fury, "you insult—you outrage me! How dare you address me—your—father thus?"

"I beg your pardon," said Ryle coldly, but sarcastically—"I thought it was to society's victim who was addressing me and not my father. I beg of you to believe, that it was not a parent, that I responded to with such heat."

The old man paced the room several times, in a state of perturbation almost painful to witness; then he seated himself in his chair, and buried his face in his hands. After a minute's silence, during which it was the impulse of Ryle to throw himself at his feet and crave pardon for having pained him—Mr. Hilliard, before he could give way to the promptings of his heart, looked up and said:

"Ryle, as I feared, this intimacy with Jasper's daughter has grown to be a grave difficulty. Now

Ryle Hilliard, my superintendent Letton is an old and faithful servant of our house; he must not, shall not be wronged!"

"Wronged, my father! By whom?" cried Ryle.

"By you, Ryle Hilliard."

"By me? I do not understand you!"

"Shall I explain?"

"I pray you to do so."

"Ryle, you are constantly in companionship with Letton's daughter. You visit her beneath her father's roof. You wander in lone places with her, unknown to her father. You are, or fancy you are, in love with her."

"Father, some sneaking, prying, tale-bearing whelp has brought this tale to you; and, as you were not indisposed to listen to a communication from such a source, you will hardly be so unjust to me, at least his superior, as not to convey to him an intimation from me to keep a wide berth of me——"

"Are you prepared, Ryle, to say this tale is not true?"

"Well, and if it be true, what then?"

"What then? What is this mad fancy, this insane passion, to come to? Do you seek to dishonor the girl?"

"Dishonor her!" he cried hoarsely. "Is it the custom for those who support the dignity of society

to do these things? If not, I demand of you, father, what act of mine, during my life, has given you the title to indulge in such a base and unfounded surmise?"

"Not by your acts do I judge, but the bitter experience of a world, of which Ryle, as yet you know, it seems but little. You confess that you love the girl—granted. Is it your intention to make the girl your wife? Has it crossed your mind that your father might object to have for a daughter-in-law, the child of his servant? That Clare and Daisy might not feel at home with a sister of so very humble an origin? Your brother, too, might probably imagine, that as the representative of a house so honorable and so wealthy as that of Hiliard, it would be your duty to form no *mesalliance*. Has aught of this occurred to you?"

With a gloomy brow, Ryle remained silent. None of this had crossed him. Then, in his mind's vision, he saw the soft, lovely face of Eva.

"Well," continued the old man as he perceived that his words had made some impression, "consider that such a union is impossible. What but ruin must ensue to the poor girl, if you continue your visits and your attentions to her——"

"Father—father!" cried Ryle impetuously.

"I gave you credit, Ryle, for being actuated by

the most honorable feelings. Will the villagers do so?—will the girl's father do so? What will the girl herself think? Are you to have no consideration for her feelings? Are you to win her love—gain possession of her heart and confidence—and then turn her aside as you would a toy of which you were tired?"

"Never, so help me Heaven!" exclaimed Ryle. Then standing up, and looking his father in the eyes, he said, "You have held up *in terrorem* the position of yourself, my sisters, and Landon, to compel me to sunder myself from Eva. Now, father, answer me one question, and though I break my heart, and sacrifice my future happiness, if you do so in a manner to square with all the rest, I will act as it seems is expected of me."

"What is your question, boy?"

"My mother, father; why is she not at our home to counsel my sisters and guide me?"

"Mention not her name!" shrieked the father in a paroxysm of fury. "Furies! death! torture! Wretch, mention her not! mention her not!"

He continued howling until he fell into a chair exhausted. Ryle, utterly astounded, retired to his room, and locking himself in, tried to bring his mind out of its excitement down to calm reason on his present position.

CHAPTER II.

LETTON COTTAGE was situated upon a hillside, not far from the woods. It possessed a garden at both back and front, and both were well filled with flowers. The only resident of the cottage was Jasper Letton and his daughter, Eva. An elderly woman, from a farm at no great distance, came daily to the cottage. Jasper, for some reasons which he never hinted, would not permit Eva to do any menial work whatever; and under the same influence, he had placed her for some years at an excellent establishment for young ladies, where she had received an education much above her station. It was this which gave her so much elegance and refinement of manner, and caused the humble dwelling and its fitting appointments to serve as a foil to her. It was this which added to the remarkable loveliness of her features and beautifully modeled form, so powerfully impressed and influenced Ryle.

He however determined not to resign Eva; he felt that he was equal to the sacrifice, and if his father, his sisters, and Landon refused to receive her, they

should not have the chance of receiving him. It was the next day he slipped off to the cottage, purposing to see her, relate all that had transpired, beg her to consent to an immediate marriage, and as soon as possible after it he would take her away. That was his scheme; he was delighted with it—it was so simple, and so easily carried out. He overlooked one thing essential to its success, and that was the complicity of Eva; but such an idea as her dissent to it never crossed him, so he hurried down to the cottage to see, and arrange the details with her.

On his arrival he learned that Jasper had gone up to Hilliard Hall, having been suddenly sent for by his father. He had been puzzling his brain for a plan to get rid of him, and lo! the thing was done. Eva seemed so glad to see him; and as he kissed her small ruby lips, he asked her if she had missed him. She—who thought of him in the early morning, noon, and night—she miss him? The very supposition brought tears into her eyes; Ryle kissed them off, and, with his natural impetuosity, told her, and unfortunately, in too plain words, all that had transpired between him and his father. Then he sketched out his plan with rapid enunciation, enlarging upon it with enthusiasm, and submitting it to her with a full conviction that it would command her unqualified approbation; and it was just as he

finished his plan for the future, that the heavy fall of her head upon his shoulder, drew his attention to the fact that she had fainted.

Overwhelmed with agony and alarm at the discovery, he staggered and nearly fell, but recovering himself by a strong exertion, he bore her gently to a bench without the cottage door, and laid her there. He obtained some water, bathed her temples, and gradually she returned to consciousness.

At length, she was sufficiently restored to be conducted into the cottage; and then ensued a scene between these two young creatures, of pain and agony such as is rarely witnessed.

Eva Letton had awakened from a dream of heaven. The progress of her liking into love for Ryle had been imperceptible; it had originated in his kind and courteous manner to her; it had been fostered by his beaming eyes, his handsome manly face, and strengthened as much by the nobility of his character.

He pressed her to his heart.

“And will you, when I am far away over the wide sea, Eva, remember me and be true to me?” Let no other arm encircle this dear waist, no other lips press these sweet lips after mine, for so long and dreary a time, have taken their last kiss from them.”

She slid through his arms, and falling on her knees exclaimed: "As I prove true or false to you, Ryle, so may I hope for happiness or misery."

"And Eva," said he earnestly, "may anticipated enjoyment perish, if I forget or evade hereafter what I have now so solemnly promised!"

One passionate embrace and they parted—parted, as they believed, for two years, for she had steadfastly refused to see him again until he returned to America entitled to claim her, and he remained true to his faith.

He rushed in wild excitement from the cottage; she retired to her room, and wept the long, long hours away.

In the meanwhile Jasper made his appearance at the hall, and was ushered into the library, where the proud nabob was seated to receive him. After the common preliminaries of such meeting had passed, Mr. Hilliard said, "Jasper, I have sent for you respecting the sudden passion of Ryle my son, has conceived for shooting. Can you explain it?"

"No sir," returned Jasper—a tall, elderly man of rather grim aspect.

"Are you sure, Jasper?"

"Quite."

"Has it never occurred to you that there might be a hidden motive, which does not appear on the surface?"

“No sir,” returned Jasper. “Mr. Ryle does seem fond of the sport, and he is a good shot.”

“But there is a secret cause!” exclaimed Mr. Hilliard, with emphasis, and fixing his eyes steadfastly upon Jasper’s face.

“Mr. Ryle is very frank and open in his way,” he said, “and I have seen no secret reason for his fondness for the sport, and I don’t believe there is one.”

“Is this ignorance real or affected, Jasper?”

“I don’t understand you. Will you be so kind as to explain?”

“Very well, Jasper! you have a daughter—a young and pretty girl.”

“Well, sir!”

“Well! man, are your eyes not open yet? My son, Ryle, comes to your cottage; does he come to see you or your daughter? He strolls with her alone in the woods; is it his fondness for the sport of bringing down birds with his gun that makes him do this.”

Jasper started, a shiver ran through his frame, his hands clinched convulsively, and the noise of his grating teeth might distinctly be heard.

“Oh! you are beginning to awake now, are you?”

“Mr. Hilliard, your son cannot be so treacherous—such a scoundrel as to——”

“Those are harsh epithets, as applied to my son. No, he has not so far committed himself as to bring

ruin on the girl and shame on you, that I know ; but you are quite conscious that marriage between them is out of the sphere of possibility ; and therefore, as any continuance of their intimacy is likely to end only in that we would both wish to avoid, you will see the necessity of sending her away at once, and of keeping from Ryle all possibility of knowing where she has been conveyed. As you obey me in this, so you will win my favor, and, mark me, Jasper, preserve your daughter's honor ! Good-morning."

Jasper bowed stiffly and left. As he hurried along he twisted his hands in his hair, and ran forward to his home, uttering a howl, forced from him by the torture of his mind. He pressed onward through a portion of the plantation leading to his cottage, and in a wild and lonely spot he encountered Ryle.

The glare which shot from Jasper's eyes told Ryle that all was known. Jasper saw that Ryle was now aware of the discovery.

"Mr. Ryle Hilliard," shouted Jasper, "are you not an infamous villain, to destroy the sanctity of my home, to ruin my child, and break my heart."

"How dare you charge me with such infamy, old man ?" cried Ryle, his eyes sparkling with rage. "I say 'tis false !"

"How dare I ? What, when with treacherous deceit you worm yourself into my confidence, and used it to crush me ?" roared Jasper.

“Jasper, you are mad!” cried Ryle passionately. “If you repeat such language, I will not answer for the consequences. My blood is up, and I am almost as mad as you are—do not move me further——”

“Not move you! not move you, the wolf that has stolen into the fold, and devoured the fairest lamb?”

“Jasper, I will not listen to these frantic ravings!” cried Ryle, his lip quivering, and his whole frame convulsed with passion.

“Let me pass—stand aside!”

“No! you have foully, basely wronged me!”

“I swear I have not.”

“Liar!”

With a yell of mad passion, Ryle uplifted a stick he had in his hand, and it descended with tremendous force upon the head of Jasper, who fell to the ground as if he had been shot, insensible. Without casting a glance upon the prostrate body, Ryle bounded past, entering the hall, and retired to his room, where he gave way to a terrible ebullition of bitter grief. Then he packed a few things into a gripsack hastily; gave instructions to his groom to saddle his blooded mare and accompany him; and shortly afterward left Hilliard Hall, and made for the railway-station. Here he dismissed his groom with the horses, and he went on alone to New York.

When he fled from the woods, after striking Jasper to the earth, he was not yet out of sight when the branches of some young trees were forced aside, and a man with repulsive features, but, showed by his attire, that he was one of the lower help in the service of Mr. Hilliard, made his appearance. He watched the retreating form of Ryle, and when it was lost to sight, he looked hard at the man who lay senseless on the grass, the blood slowly trickling from an abrasion of the skin upon the forehead.

"He is only stunned," he muttered; "although it was a tidy whack. I wish it had been harder—I do! I'd a beat his brains out, I would! You got me two years for stealing, did you? I ain't forgot that! I ain't forgot that! I have sworn to have my revenge and I think it's come now—rather—so here goes!"

The ruffian drew from his pocket a formidable clasp knife, and knelt down by Jasper's side.

"Don't tell any one, will yer?" he said, as he raised his arm, and then plunged the blade of the knife up to the handle into the prostrate man's breast; he drew it out, and the blood spurted out like a fountain over the assassin's face and hands. He uttered an exclamation of sickening horror; but when he was about to repeat the blow, the low

hoarse bark of a large hound broke on his ear. He turned round with an affrighted look, and then leaping to his feet, he hurled the knife from him, and murmuring, with an oath :

“One of Jasper’s dogs—I know his teeth,” he turned into the deep woods and fled.

CHAPTER III.

RANDLE HILLIARD, after the departure of Jasper, sat alone in his room pondering. The position of affairs in which his eldest son and the daughter of his head man were the principal actors, occasioned him great discomfort. He looked back into the solemn past, and the retrospect was anything but reassuring. Too well he remembered the overwhelming influence female beauty had over him in his early days; with bitterness he looked back to the time when counsels of friends, the commands of parents, even the prospects of unhappiness, failed to emancipate him from the fascination of loveliness.

What extent of obedience was he, therefore, to expect from his son Ryle. He must force Jasper to send Eva away to parts unknown. And with these thoughts uppermost in his mind, he set out for Letton Cottage. He thought he could count upon Jasper's advocacy of his views, unless he had suddenly grown ambitious to seize upon what he might imagine would be a splendid opening for his

daughter. Even then, he fancied he knew how to manage him.

His way lay through the park, and thence across a meadow into the plantation, through which there was a beaten track leading to the cottage of Jasper. He had to pass the place where Ryle had unhappily encountered Jasper, and on reaching it, was startled by the prolonged wailing howl of a hound—a long, dreary, terrible cry it was, and made him shudder. He quickened his step, but he drew only nearer to the sound, and a sudden wind of the path brought to his view a sight which made him quail and grow faint.

Upon the grass, stretched out in grim death, lay the body of his head man, Letton, blood upon his forehead, blood weltering from his side; slowly, it is true, but still weeping from the wound made by Randle Hilliard's ruffian emissary. At his head sat a favorite hound, who uttered the mournful howl, and who seemed to cast his large eyes in eagerness upon Mr. Hilliard as though to ask for aid.

Shocked and almost terrified, he knelt down by the body and raised one of Jasper's hands; it was clinched, but cold as marble—life indeed appeared to be quite extinct.

At first the thought that Jasper had committed

self-destruction crowded into his mind, but a glance at the position of his body, and the marks of feet trampling down the grass where the body lay, forbade him for a moment entertaining such supposition. The man had been evidently murdered; but by whom? He clasped his hands wildly together, and rushed at once to Jasper's cottage to raise an alarm and obtain assistance. All the while he fled, the question rung like some dreadful knell through his ears: "Who had committed this murder?"

Out of the woods to the hillside, where stood the cottage of which he was in quest, on he flew, reaching it pale and breathless; he staggered up to it, and pushing open the door, entered. The apartment was untenanted: he called, but no reply was made; he passed through into the back rooms, he searched the outbuildings, no one was there. He returned to the front room, and was about to ascend into the rooms above in the hope yet to meet some one who would aid him in raising an alarm, when he observed a shadow fall upon the window. Through the diamond-shape panes, he observed the sallow and repulsive face of the man he had employed to track the footsteps of his son Ryle, and report to him faithfully his every action.

It was a relief, notwithstanding the man's hang-

dog visage, to see him. He beckoned him hastily; and the man giving an uneasy look to right and left, obeyed the summons.

"I want you, Wolf," said Mr. Hilliard, "to hunt up some of my people at your utmost speed. A foul crime has been committed."

"What, sir?" exclaimed the fellow, in a voice which was but a hissing whisper. "Did you come here through the woods?"

"I did."

"And you saw——"

"A human body lying there—a man who has been murdered. You know of this, Wolf?"

"I am sorry to say I do."

"Speak out, man! What have you to say? Do you know who it is, who lies there murdered?"

"I do sir!"

"And you did not summon help?"

"No!"

"Why, fellow? tell me all you know."

Wolf turned his white face and sickly eyes round the room; he peered out of the window, he even strode to the door, and looked in all directions, then he returned to Mr. Hilliard, and said:

"Have you nerve enough to know all?"

"What are you driving at, Wolf?" cried Mr. Hilliard, a dreadful apprehension taking possession

of him. "Speak out at once as I command you, and summon assistance."

"You must not blame me, then, if the disclosures does not prove agreeable," said Wolf, looking up between his beetling brows.

"Go on," exclaimed Mr. Hilliard, drawing a deep breath, and turning deadly cold at suggestions, which in spite of himself, would present themselves to him, as he tried to think without a shadow of foundation.

"You employed me to keep a constant eye upon the movements of your son Ryle," said Wolf. "To ascertain whither he went, to whom he spoke, with whom he associated, and to give you a strict account of his actions taking place out of your sight. Them, I believe, is your own words."

"True—true! Go on—you rack me with your prolixity."

"I believe I have done my task well, for you have known all about the meetings of your son, Mr. Ryle, and Eva Letton, as they have taken place, since I was put on the scent. You don't know all about this last affair, and I don't think you'll like to hear; but when you have heard it, you will understand that it will be worth a pretty sum to keep it from slipping between my teeth——"

"Wretch! you torture me beyond endurance!

Repeat all you are in possession of with respect to this dreadful matter, or leave me at once."

"Well, here goes, then," said Wolf, again glancing uneasily around him. "If so be as you will have it, the fault ain't mine. You know I followed Mr. Ryle on his last visit here. I followed him on his return to the Hall. In that woods he met Jasper Letton coming from an interview with you."

"No, no!"

"As soon as they faced each other, hot and angry words ensued. Jasper challenged Mr. Ryle with endeavoring to ruin the peace of his family, and Mr. Ryle denied it. One word brought on another, when Jasper called Mr. Ryle a liar. Then Mr. Ryle struck him with a stick; then they closed, and grappled, and twisted; and then your son drew from his shooting jacket a clasp-knife——"

"He did not use it?" gasped Mr. Hilliard.

"He gripped the handle tight in his hand, and stuck the blade into the old man's heart, and he fell down like a stone, dead on the grass."

A horrified shriek pierced the ears of Mr. Hilliard and his myrmidon, as the last sentence left the lips of the latter. They turned their eyes with startled emotion to the spot from whence the cry proceeded, and saw standing in the doorway lead-

ing to the upper apartment, Eva Letton, with her hands clasped, white as death, swaying to and fro—her whole aspect one of dire agony. Another instant, and she fell to the floor utterly insensible.

Mr. Hilliard pressed his two hands to his head and felt like one bereft of his senses; he groaned and shivered, and sunk into a chair powerless.

Wolf, though excited, and even trembling in every limb, was more self-possessed than Mr. Hilliard; and obtaining some water, he bathed Mr. Hilliard's temples; and then, when he found that he was recovering, he raised Eva from the floor and laid her upon a couch which was in the room, still motionless, and to all appearances dead.

Mr. Hilliard made desperate efforts to control the fearful emotion under which he labored, and succeeded sufficiently to say to Wolf: "Leave the poor girl to my care; hurry and gather some of the household, and bring here the—the—the—body of Jasper. Quick—quick! Then hasten to the village, and send here the doctor who attends at the Hall; but not a word of——"

"And the price of that secrecy?" exclaimed Wolf in an undertone, with furtive glances at him.

"You shall be paid well, never fear—even beyond your most sanguine expectations!" cried

Mr. Hilliard. "The honor of my family must be preserved. And now begone; for such reparation as can be made to this poor child, shall be done."

When he had gone, Mr. Hilliard bathed the temples and chafed the hands of Eva; but he only succeeded in restoring her to life, for her to fall into a rapid succession of hysterical fits accompanied by delirious ravings, in which the names of Ryle and her father were coupled, but only in the wildest and most incomprehensible manner. He tried by exclamations, by exhortations, by appeals, to bring her to a calmer state of mind, but in vain; and it was not until she was utterly exhausted that she fell into a state of lethargy, which it was difficult for him to understand whether it was another phase of syncope, or the precursor of death, arising from a sudden and tremendous shock to the system. The tears at length found way through his eyelids, and coursed each other down his cheeks.

"Has it come to this?" he exclaimed. "Both to fall a sacrifice! It had been better far had he married her, in spite of the world's scorn, than this had come to pass. Oh heaven! should the fatal truth become known. Where, then, will be the pride of ancestry—the rank—the pomp of wealth?"

He buried his face in his hands, and fell groaning upon his knees, at the side of Eva.

He was aroused from this position by the sound of horse's feet, which approached the cottage and paused before the door. He hurried out. It was the doctor. Wolf was fortunate enough to meet him at no very great distance from the cottage, returning from a patient.

"I am very glad to see you, Dr. Richard, your best services are required here in a case of much emergency."

"Ay, sir," returned the doctor, bursting into the cottage. "Wolf, the fellow who stopped me, has given me an inkling of what's wrong. Ah, I see, one patient is here. Hysteria! This girl is very ill—dangerously ill. She must be removed at once to bed. Is there no woman here?"

"I have seen no other than this poor girl, since I came to break to her the unhappy event which has thrown her into this distressing state."

"Oh, yes there is," exclaimed the doctor, "Old Mother Barbara is somewhere about. She is as deaf as a post, but I'll find her."

He darted out of the back entrance, and in two or three minutes returned with an elderly woman, who did the hard work of the cottage. As soon as she saw Eva, she uttered a cry of distress, and commenced wringing her hands, and giving way to the most extravagant gestures; but a few words from

the doctor, shouted in her ear, made her comprehend, the necessity of doing her best to assist, instead of wasting her strength in weeping.

The doctor with her help, conveyed Eva to her bedroom, where the old woman contrived to get her into bed, while the doctor descended and applied to his case for some restoratives; holding out at the same time very little hope of restoring Eva to her reason, even if he rescued her from death. And once more ascended to the bedroom, leaving Mr. Hilliard alone with his own thoughts.

A shadow darkened the doorway, and the figure of a woman, closely muffled in traveling attire, entered. Mr. Hilliard turned toward her, and as she caught sight of his face, she started and retreated two or three steps, uttering a faint exclamation of surprise.

He waited for her to speak, but as she did not do so, he inquired whether she was a friend of Eva's who perhaps having heard of her sudden blow, had come to offer her aid.

"I am a friend to Eva Letton—a near and dear one," she replied, still keeping her face closely veiled. "It is with pain that I learn from you that she is ill, but be assured she will have my closest attention and care."

Without another word she hurried up the stairs

to Eva's room. Almost at the same moment, the sound of the hurried tread of men's feet was caught by the quick expectant ear of Mr. Hilliard. His heart throbbed fiercely and his face grew ghastly pale; he staggered, and clung to a chair to keep himself from falling. The cottage door was rudely flung open, and a party of his servants, headed by the constable entered.

“And the body, where was that?”

These men had it not with them. Mr. Hilliard expected each instant to see four men march in with it upon their shoulders, but they came not; and then he began to grow conscious that they were telling him that they had searched the woods for the body, but it was not there; that they had hunted in every direction for it, but though traces of a struggle were plain enough in the broken twigs, the marks of feet and blood upon the grass, the body of Jasper Letton, was no where to be seen.

Incredible as this appeared, it was yet the truth, and he accompanied the men back to make a yet further search, but with no better success. The body could not be found; but while they were searching the second time, dreadful cries for help were heard, accompanied by the baying growls of a hound.

All rushed to the spot from whence the sounds issued—fortunately as it proved for Wolf; for the hound belonging to Jasper had fastened upon his neck, and would have torn him to pieces if he had not been beaten off and secured. No trace of Jasper was found, notwithstanding the search was kept up for several days.

Not less singular was the fact that when Mr. Hilliard and the doctor paid an early visit to the cottage the following morning to ascertain the state of Eva, they found the cottage closed up; and on affecting an entrance through the window, it was discovered that the strange woman, Mother Barbara and Eva, were gone. Not a living thing was left in the cottage; and it was plain by the confusion in which many articles of wearing apparel were tossed about, that the departure had been as sudden as secret.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHOLE population of a suburban village, not far from Washington, in which stood Hilliard Hall, was kept in a state of intense excitement the following day by the strange events which had taken place, with regard to Jasper Letton and his daughter.

The statement of Mr. Hilliard and Wolf, with respect of the discovery made by them of the murdered body of Jasper, were repeated in every possible form of exaggeration.

The subsequent disappearance of Eva Letton and Barbara—in itself mysterious enough—was yet made the vehicle for the most extravagant reports. Superstition stepped in to aid the babblers in their warm communications, and a fiction was at length shaped out, purporting to be a narration of the events, but which really contained not a particle of truth beyond the mention of the discovery of Jasper's body, as it appeared wounded to death, and the flight of Eva. Hints were thrown out, implicating Mr. Hilliard in a grave manner with the affair; and it was openly cited, as a damning fact, that

Jasper had an interview with Mr. Hilliard on the morning of the murder; that he had followed him immediately after he had left the Hall, and was first to give information of a crime which, as it seemed, he was actually near enough, if not mixed up with it, to have prevented it. That Jasper's body should have vanished without the complicity of Mr. Hilliard, was to say that it had been supernaturally spirited away by a certain person, whose name it is considered to "Keep dark;" who did not think fit to wait the usual process of decomposition, but claimed his own upon the first opportunity that afforded. The inference drawn, therefore, was that if the Evil One had not by his infernal agency swept Jasper, his daughter, and Mother Barbara off into the bargain, he had from some very strong motive himself slain his head man, and also put Eva and Barbara out of the way immediately after the doctor had quitted the cottage.

One reason for this, perhaps, was that a belief generally obtained in the village that Mr. Hilliard, in years gone past, had put away his wife in some foreign land, and that Jasper, who went away with him, and had been, as it was considered, a confidential dependant for many years, was privy to this circumstance, whether crime or not. It was said, with many a nod and wink, that the murdered man

had known too much ; that in a late quarrel he had threatened to reveal all he was acquainted with, and Mr. Hilliard had purchased his silence at the fearful price of murder.

Wolf had only to show his nose into the village to be seized upon by the idle gossips who put a variety of questions to him, and offered him unlimited glasses of beer if he would only tell them "all" he knew. With many an oath, he thrust them aside ; yet nevertheless, he assisted in their tongues wagging, for he, too, before a week had passed away, suddenly disappeared.

A shrewd detective officer was employed by Mr. Hilliard to trace the flight of Eva, but he left after a day or two, saying he had but a faint clue which he would endeavor to work up.

A letter came to Mr. Hilliard from Ryle. He acknowledged striking Jasper, pleaded the provocation given, begged his father to aid Jasper for his sake, and concluded by saying that he would not depart from Europe for a few years.

Mr. Hilliard left his grand mansion for New York, leaving only the housekeeper and a few servants in it. In New York he was called upon by the detective who told him that he had ascertained that Eva Letton and Mother Barbara, and a tall dark lady had left Letton's cottage in company.

They arrived in New York, obtained berths on board of a Boston steamer, and departed. The dark lady giving her name as Clare Day.

"That name," murmured Mr. Hilliard aghast. "Has she taken this method of revenging——" He suddenly paused—and rewarded the detective, who withdrew.

As soon as he was left alone he paced the room.

"The mystery thickens," he said. "The same name—the very place—what can it mean? What has *she* to do with Jasper's daughter? His wife was drowned, or that might afford some clue to the object. Can *she*, by any strange possibility, have learned aught respecting the fatal attachment between Ryle and the wretched girl now smuggled away, and would like a blow at my peace through her? It cannot be! I shall go mad—mad! I must ascertain this—I *must* know whether such surmise can have any foundation in truth. I will follow them to Boston—I will nerve myself to my task—I will unravel this plot, if plot there be, or will prove it to be a mere suspicion of a too susceptible brain."

The evening preceding his departure he spent with Landon and his two daughters, for he knew not how long he might be absent. It was at a

moment when he was more disposed to discard his armor and pomp and pride, that a footman entered the apartment, and went toward Mr. Hilliard.

“If you please sir, there is a person who begs you to grant—him——”

Mr. Hilliard turned upon him fiercely: “I gave orders that I would be disturbed by no one.”

“But this person says——”

“Begone, scoundrel!—leave the room!” cried Mr. Hilliard rising up angrily.

The servant retired. In ten minutes he re-appeared, and said, “Mr. Hilliard, we have exhausted every method to get rid of this person, but he won’t go. Had we not better send for an officer?”

By an almost superhuman effort, he recovered an appearance of outward calmness, and said to the servant:

“Let the man be conducted to my private room. I will see him there.”

When the servant disappeared, Mr. Hilliard turning to his children, perceiving the wonder expressed in their features, said, “It is an erratic fellow, employed by me to make some inquiries. I forgot to leave word to admit him when he came. Nothing more—nothing more.”

He hurried to the room, and on entering he per-

ceived, seated in an armchair, with his muddy boots and feet tossed over one of the arms, engaged in making sarcastic observations, interlarded with oaths, to the servant—Wolf Scrubb.

CHAPTER V.

RYLE HILLIARD continued from the moment that he struck down Jasper in the woods, up to the signing of the letter he addressed to his father, in a whirl of excitement. In passion he had struck down Jasper Letton. His self-reproach for the act—exclusively on Eva's account—was unendurable, and he rushed to New York, to fly from himself.

He had changed his outward appearance skillfully, with his black wig, artificial mustache and whiskers, he looked very much like a distinguished foreigner. He was master of several languages and found no difficulty in assuming a dialect compounded of broken French and English, the use of which ably assisted him in concealing himself from the kind inquiries of those who were in active search for him. But while devising a plan for returning to the neighborhood of Hilliard Hall, he met a farmer from the same neighborhood who seemed to be on business in the city. Knowing him to be a simple-minded individual, accosted him, feeling quite sure that Farmer Sparrow would not

have recognized his own son in such a disguise as he was in.

“How do you do, Farmer Sparrow, how’s all the folks at home?” asked Ryle.

“How do, stranger, ’clare to goodness but I don’t know you; folks were all well when I left home.”

“Why, Farmer Sparrow, I got acquainted with you when I was stopping at Hilliard Hall. I hope they are all well; I expect to go there in a few days.”

“No use now, stranger. Family is all here in New York.”

“What, all?”

“Yes, all,” said Farmer Sparrow. “Couldn’t stand the murder of Jasper Letton.”

“Murder of who?” cried Ryle.

“Why of Letton, Hilliard’s head man to be sure. Somebody beat his skull in, in a lonely woods, not far from his own cottage.”

Ryle gasped for breath, and staggered back. Then he seized the countryman by the arm, and said between his teeth, “And the murderer?”

“Ah! that is it! Don’t know who did it—but Letton is killed, sure enough.”

“By—by a blow—on the temple?”

“Yes, surely. And it is strange enough, I can tell you. The daughter fled away the same night;

some do say for one cause, and some say for another ; but I do say, to drown herself, poor girl ! for the old man was all she had to look up to."

It seemed to Ryle as if his brain would burst. He stood like one changed from mortal life into a statue. The roar of passing vehicles, the presence of hurrying foot travelers, the din of busy traffic ; he was not conscious of ; he saw only the grim, gloomy woods ; the bleeding body of Jasper lying there ; the white figure of Eva, flying into the black and frowning waters of some deep pool. He did not see that even Sparrow was struck by the sudden wildness of his manner ; or that a low-looking fellow gazed at him with eager eyes, as though beneath the disguise he recognized the true person ; suddenly he uttered a cry, turned, and fled like a startled deer—was out of sight before Sparrow could make an exclamation, or the glaring eyes of the grimy ruffian could note which street he took. Fled ! fled as if from an avenging spirit—fled as if a troop of officers of justice were after him, led on by the spirit of retribution—whither he knew not—remembered not. All he knew was that he was pursued by the howling cry of Jasper's blood for vengeance ; and he fled on—on, as though his flight was never to end, and the troop of ghostly myrmidons of vengeance would never quit the pursuit.

It was a long time before he again became conscious of what was passing about him. Weeks had passed away, when one evening, in the dim light, he became aware that he was in some strange room, and that at the foot of his bed a young girl sat employed in needlework, that did not occupy much of her attention.

He lay still and motionless, wondering.

He found it difficult to call up the past though he tried; there was a hazy wandering sensation averse to thought altogether. Still he could tell that he was in a strange place and among strangers.

Presently he said in a feeble voice, "Please tell me where I am?"

The young girl started and threw down her work, and came toward him and said, "Are you better?"

"I do not know. I remember not to have been ill. Where am I?" he said in a low tone.

"Among friends; do not speak, you are too weak yet. I will go and call my mother."

"No, but where am I?" again asked Ryle, pressing his hand to his head, and trying to recollect how or why he could be there.

"Do you not remember coming one day and taking these appartments?" she said, looking at him with some surprise.

"No."

"Don't you remember telling me, when I informed you that my mother was out on business, it did not matter—that you had decided on taking the apartments for six months, paying for the whole time in advance, don't you remember now?"

"Not a circumstance."

"That same night you came back, out of breath with running; and when you got in this room you fell down in a faint. My mother had just returned, we got medical assistance, and you were recovered only to become wildly delirious, raving about all kinds of strange things; then you were seized with a violent fever, and you were given up. But there sir, you must not talk; be quiet and I will call my mother, she will be so glad to know you are better."

In a few minutes she returned with a pleasant-faced woman and a gray-haired elderly man, who was unmistakably the doctor, for he made his way to the bedside; feeling Ryle's pulse, said: "That will do—you are better, though there is still much to do. Patience, quiet, no talking, nourishment, and so on, with some little strengthening tonic, I will send, and you will soon be out again as strong and as well as ever. Your little woman there, Miss Hading, has been a very good child—a very good, kind patient little nurse, must not just

yet awhile, let her little industrious tongue wag. Miss Sally may watch, and nurse if she will; but for a few days, at least, it must be in silence."

About a week after the doctor pronounced Ryle out of his hands, Mrs. Hading entered and said, "There are two persons downstairs who state that they wish to have a few words with you."

"With me? What name did they ask for?" he asked in surprise.

"Mr. Ryle, of Hilliard Hall. I told them that was not your name, but they said they were sure you were the person, and if I would say that they came from Hilliard Hall on very important business that you would see them."

"What kind of persons are they, Mrs. Hading?" he inquired.

"One, if I may speak plain, is a perfect ruffian, and the other does not look much better."

"Be good enough to tell them, I know nothing about them, or the place of which they speak; and if they hesitate to go, I see a policeman standing on the corner—call him to your aid."

Mrs. Hading obeyed his instructions. He heard some altercation below, but a prompt reference to the policeman settled the question; and from the window Ryle saw cross the street the man Wolf,

and a fellow he recognized, who had been pointed out to him as a dangerous scoundrel.

This retreat would not do for him any longer. He knew Wolf—not as the spy who had been set upon him to watch his movements, but as one connected with Hilliard Hall estate, and he had no doubt the fellow had some clue to connect him with the death of Letton, and was in search of him.

He felt inexpressibly miserable, and without much power to act; he, however, determined to leave, without having an idea where to go. The death of Letton at once altered his design; and henceforth he must actually become a wanderer and an outcast, with the stain of blood on his hands.

The world was all before him where to choose; but what spot to select to hide him and his sorrow he knew not.

This was decided for him by the doctor. Ryle paid him his bill, and, thanking him for his kindness, mentioned to him his immediate departure.

The doctor shook his head, and said:

“Where are you going, may I ask?—professionally, you know—for you are not well yet, remember.”

“I have not yet decided.”

“Let me decide for you. Until you are strong enough to render change of place of no conse-

quence, what do you say to Mexico, for example. I think it will do you a great deal of good."

"Mexico be it," said Ryle, with assumed indifference.

That same night he took his farewell of Mrs. Hading and Sally. He remembered them with princely liberality. "Good-by, my good, kind, patient, enduring little nurse; so long as I am in existence, I will be your friend, Sally. You may need one; in me you will find one—faithful, and sincere; and fail not to call upon me, should occasion require. A letter, *poste restante*, Mexico, will be sure to reach me, unless you hear from me again; and now farewell for a long, long time."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. HILLIARD, upon entering his study, beheld, seated in an attitude at once insolently familiar and offensively vulgar, the scoundrel Wolf. He was muddled from collar to heels, and greatly disordered; his face was grimy, his eyes bloodshot, his hair matted, his lips crusted with tobacco juice, and with the sound of his hoarse voice, rendered yet more husky by intoxication, for he was indulging in low ribaldry at the expense of the electrified servant who had conducted the "vulgar person" to the apartment in which he was seated, remaining with him to see that he did not pocket any of the valuables within reach.

Mr. Hilliard turned sick on perceiving the state he was in, and would have ordered him to be kicked out of the house instantly if he dared. But oh! the potent mastery crime holds over the implicated! He was compelled to smooth his frowning and to keep down his indignation he felt at the scoundrel's astounding presumption.

As soon as the dull eyes of Wolf alighted upon

him, he said, "Hallo—old fellow ! Co—hic—come then, he ? I—hic—I tole' ol' colli—hic——"

"If you have aught to say to me," said Mr. Hilliard, sternly. "I will listen to you, if not you must leave this house instantly."

"Oh ! hic—I'll—'blige you—but you—know the—hic—the murder won't rest."

Mr. Hilliard turned to his servant, and said, "Leave the room ; when I ring, only, I will require you, but then be prompt in attendance."

When the man had gone he turned to Wolf, and with a manner which in some degree awed the ruffian, said: "Listen to me; a repetition of this conduct, and your life shall not be worth a minute's purchase. I care not what you may threat ; but if you dare again, scoundrel, to thrust yourself into my house in this state, nothing can or will prevent the infliction upon you of a sound punishment, which will prevent repetition."

Wolf balanced himself on his chair for a moment, and then muttered : "Scoundrel ! well—hic—that's plucky too !"

"What do you want ? answer, and briefly," exclaimed Mr. Hilliard, determined if possible, to retain the advantage he fancied he had gained.

"Money !" ejaculated Wolf.

"I thought so, you should have written for it, not come in person."

"Can't write; wasn't taught."

"Then get some one to write for you."

"Ha! ha! Who—hic—should I tell to write about the murder, eh?"

Mr. Hilliard pressed his hand to his head and paced the room, and then turned with feverish impatience to the ruffian, and said: "What sum do you want?"

"Well—hic—a cool thousand or two—hic! I can get along a little while with that."

"No," said Mr. Hilliard, promptly; "I have no objection to give you a handsome sum, but it is on condition you leave this country forever. If you agree to this, half shall be paid down on a day you may appoint, and half on the day which the vessel that is to bear you to some distant land sails from these shores. But I must have good guaranty that you accept my terms and abide by them before I part with a dollar."

"You think me an enemy. I ain't no such thing. I wants to do you a good turn and you won't let me."

"I wish you to consider my terms—to accept or refuse them."

"And what if I refuse?"

"Do your worst; I know how to handle you."

"Then you defies me?"

"I can do so. What have you to tell? A wild improbable story! Where is the murdered man's body? Go! I have nothing to fear from you."

Wolf grated his teeth, then said, "Look a-here! I knows where, this moment, to place my hand on the 'sassin, I knows where to do it, and can prove it! I can have you put in court to swear—to a lie, if you likes; but, I knows those who'll worry all you knows out of you, an' I knows where Jasper's lies at the bottom of a deep pond, waiting only to come up when called for. That staggers yer, does it? You defies me, does yer! Well, do it! or down with the money."

Mr. Hilliard lost his self-possession, and sank into his seat with a groan; he covered his face with his hands.

"I don't do my work by halves," hissed Wolf in his ear; an' I knew *that body* would be wanted some day, unless I could stow it where nobody know'd of it but myself. My game is to live, an' if anybody made a livin' out of a dead man, I made up my mind it should be me. Will you pay up now, or am I to do my worst?"

Mr. Hilliard once more leaped to his feet.

"Where is my son? Take me to him and I will shower gold upon you which shall glut even your greed."

Before Wolf could answer, a knock was heard at the door, which was immediately opened and a servant made his appearance and said, "If you please sir, the person named Byrnes wishes to see you when you are disengaged."

Wolf retired to the window.

"Is it the detective?" inquired Mr. Hilliard with assumed calmness.

"I believe it is, sir," returned the man. "He did not wish me to disturb you; he said he was acquainted with the individual to whom you granted an interview, and he would wait, he was in no particular hurry."

Wolf hissed something through his teeth which Mr. Hilliard could not catch, but he said to the servant, "Tell Mr. Byrnes that I will see him as soon as I am at liberty."

"I think I hear him coming up, sir," said the servant, as he retired and closed the door after him.

The instant his back was turned, Wolf flung up the window and looked about him. He made an exclamation, almost as it appeared, of exultation, and then leaped lightly on to the window-sill, closing down the window again, leaving himself outside, and Mr. Hilliard inside in a state of alarm it is impossible to describe. He knew that there was a

clear fall below of about forty or fifty feet; there was nothing for the man to get at—nothing but the small ledge outside the window between him and death, by being dashed to atoms.

Each moment he expected to hear the falling man's feet scrape against the wall, and the dull bound on the pavement far away below, announcing his fearful fate. It seemed as if he must shriek with horror.

At that moment the door softly opened, and Byrnes, the detective, made his appearance; then Mr. Hilliard, overcome by the contending emotions, fainted.

Detective Byrnes saw at a glance the condition of Mr. Hilliard, and rang the bell violently. At the same time he looked with the quick eye of a hawk round the apartment, but no other person was present. No door led into any other apartment. He was at the window in a second, and flung it up, and looked out; then he drew in his head, and shut down the window. The servant entered all in a flurry, the detective ordered him to bring some cold water quick; they bathed Mr. Hilliard's temples, and in a few minutes he opened his eyes. After glaring around him, he rose to his feet, stared at the servant, at the detective, pressed his hand to his head, then cried: "Is this all a horrid dream?"

"Pray be seated, and collect yourself," exclaimed Byrnes quietly; and turning to the servant, said to him: "You had better leave the room, and keep your tongue within your teeth."

Mr. Hilliard, after a struggle with his emotions, became sufficiently calm to demand the cause of Byrnes' presence on that occasion.

"My business was with the man Wolf Scrubb. I wanted him upon a burglary case; a very bad one too, for blood was shed. I traced him here. I do not seek to pry into any secrets of yours; but I would suggest that the fellow is a desperate scoundrel. He had seven years at Sing-Sing for a burglary, but was one of the first men let out on a ticket-of-leave. He's been at his old tricks again; and this time if he is convicted, I expect he will be required to give his opinion of the air of Sing-Sing again. He has escaped me this time, but I shall have him yet."

"Unless he is dead beneath the window."

"No, no, Mr. Hilliard, he got down safe enough, it's an old trick of his."

"A trick, to fall fifty feet in safety?"

"No trick exactly, Mr. Hilliard, but an acquirement; I should have said; he escaped from prison by it. There is a sharp angle formed by a jutting wall just outside there, and he went down it, shoulders

and feet ; that's all. It's a daring feat, but I suspect he found it was neck or nothing with him. I have only to add, that if he manages to keep out of my hands and the less you have to do with him the better."

"I—I employed him to watch the actions of a—a relative, who I feared was pursuing a wrong path ; that was all," exclaimed Mr. Hilliard, embarrassed under the bright eagle eyes of the detective.

"I will not detain you further than to say, Mr. Hilliard, that yesterday from information I obtained, a Mr. Adon Wellington, in the service of the Day family, started for Mexico yesterday."

"Did you see him?" asked Mr. Hilliard with eagerness.

"I did."

"Describe him to me," cried Mr. Hilliard.

"He was tall," exclaimed Byrnes, consulting a small memorandum book.

"With gray hair?"

"Yes ; he had a wound on his forehead, which had been strapped up. And looked very ill, as though he had recently recovered from great prostration. He walked with the aid of a cane, but with difficulty."

"His features, were they strongly marked?"

"Yes, with a grim expression. He had gray eyes,

and moved his head slowly back as he looked at you."

"Yes—yes—yes!" gasped Mr. Hilliard.

"And has one of his front teeth broken," added the detective.

"It is he!" exclaimed Mr. Hilliard, sinking back in his chair.

"That is all," exclaimed the detective, closing his little memorandum book.

"All! all, my friend! You know not that the whole happiness of a family is involved in what you have just made known to me. I know not how to reward you, but as far as money can do it, you shall not complain."

"I will be well satisfied with money that is due me."

Mr. Hilliard learned now all he could obtain, or so far as he could expect. He dismissed the detective with a very handsome present, and then sat down to think.

"So," said he musingly, "the silence is broken at last! The veil is lifting, the gloomy obscurity of years is dissipating! What will it disclose? What shape is the bitter animosity, the withering hatred to take? Wholesale destruction of me and my house, of those who are the treasures of my heart?"

“Well, I will meet her upon her own battle-ground, fight her with her own weapons! Do all, dare all that she can do or dare! Hers the false step, not mine! We will see what the future will bring forth.”

The next morning Mr. Hilliard sped on his way to Boston. On his arrival he found Clare Day and Eva had departed for Mexico, he followed them in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Mr. Hilliard made the arrangements necessary to enable him to leave New York, he provided for the possibility of being away for an extended period. Landon would go to college immediately after his father's departure; and contrary to his first intentions, he decided that his daughters should remain at their mansion on Fifth avenue, under the care and guidance, of an elderly maiden lady, a distant connection of the family. Professors of the highest reputation were to be engaged to perfect the young ladies in various branches of education, and in those accomplishments essential to their high sphere in life. All was to be under the control of the elderly maiden relative, who was to be invested with full power to act as Mr. Hilliard's representative during his absence. Proper intimation of this was conveyed to the steward, and to the housekeeper.

The maiden lady, Miss Frost, and her maid Edesa arrived, and were conducted to the rooms prepared for the former; and there they found another maid,

ready to attend upon Miss Frost, but she was dismissed, Edesa alone being permitted to wait upon the antiquated column of starch.

Clare and Daisy, who were desirous of receiving her in an affectionate manner, were repelled by the icy grandeur—rather the frigid courtesy of the old lady's manner; for there was no mistake in that she elevated them into a position higher than her own, although she knew they were about to be placed under her guidance and control. Still the formal precision she displayed toward them compelled them to take back the spontaneous offering of their hearts and toss ice and snow to her in return.

The time passed on. Mr. Hilliard was gone, Landon, too, was borne by rail to Alma Mater. Miss Frost, as the household was distinctly aware, was in the full plentitude of her power, and Clare and Daisy were all the day employed in mastering the languages with their different professors. One of these professors was an Italian, about thirty.

Signor Sibino Danato had a handsome face; was of an olive complexion; with black hair, and mustache; his features were regular; his eyes especially brilliant, and were frequently shrouded by long eyelashes, as though he were conscious of their beauty, and made a point of exhibiting them.

He was recommended to Miss Frost by her maid

Edesa. So was admitted into the family to teach Clare and Daisy Hilliard.

When first introduced to them, they both experienced a strange thrill of terror. They were both young and beautiful, and his large glittering eyes seemed to gloat on them as a tiger upon its victim just ere it makes a spring.

Clare shuddered when he approached her, with an instinctive, indefinable horror which seemed preposterous, but which she could not shake from her.

As for Daisy, she openly rebelled, at least to Miss Frost, against a continuance of lessons with Signor Danato.

"Why! Daisy Hilliard?" exclaimed the column of starch, sitting up in a stately form and looking like a petrification of her living self, as she heard, with such astonishment as she was modeled to feel, this unexpected announcement.

"I do not know exactly why, Miss Frost, but I do know that I will not take another lesson from him, and shall endeavor to bring Clare to my opinion and determination."

She stamped her foot with passion as she exclaimed this; and she ran out of the apartment to her own room.

The eyes of Edesa the Italian maid pursued her retreating form as if they were a couple of fire balls following in her track.

Edesa broke the silence.

"Miss Daisy is under a spell," said she, in a low, quiet tone; "I am in fear that her false impression is the result of a warm imagination ripening."

Miss Frost groaned. "What an exhibition! A young lady to stamp her foot and run out of the room like that." She moaned.

"To have such strange feelings!" suggested Edesa.

"Tut, tut, Edesa," she exclaimed, as she steered with dignified pace to the door; "feeling, indeed! a lady has no feelings, at least, to fit her to her high position in society, she should have none." Saying this she proceeded to Daisy's room.

Edesa followed. For an instant her eyes gleamed with fiery hatred as Miss Frost uttered her last sentiment, but in an instant she was calm as usual.

And all this time, that is, during the preceding colloquy, Signor Danato was occupied in giving Clare her lesson in Italian.

There was an inconceivable repugnance, mixed with a species of mortal terror, in her feelings, and yet a degree of fascination, which rather drew her toward him than repelled him from her. Still she went on with her lessons, feeling and knowing that the man was spreading round her an atmosphere, as it seemed, of impurity. He turned the language of

his native land, so susceptible of such a purpose to this end.

The extracts given for translation, even the verbs selected for conjugation, expressed love and passion.

“ Ah ! Miss Clare,” he said, fastening his brilliant eyes upon hers, and speaking with a terrible earnestness. “ I, too, can love, fondly, passionately, madly; I, too, can hate, and like my countrymen, take a dreadful revenge ; not on the object of my hate, by the knife, but on those they loved, by poison, by subtle processes, which would rack, torture, and at least destroy them ; and she I hated should know, without the power to prevent, that she was the occasion of the mortal misery and inevitable death of all she loved best on the earth. This would be the fate of her whom I might love, but who, perhaps, would spurn and reject me. But I pray you to pardon me, Miss Clare,” he said as he saw her face grew pale with fright ; so changing the expression of his features, he added in his usual tone: “ What to you can be the feelings with which my poor heart is animated ? You the lady, I your humble teacher.”

He did not give her time to leave before him, but bowing low, retreated hastily from the apartment.

As soon as he had left, Clare hurried to her room to find restoratives to keep to her from fainting.

He at a dark angle of the stairs met Edesa. She gripped his wrist, and said in Italian to him, "Be cautious, or you will fail and be thrust into the street. Miss Daisy detests you; she refuses to see you again, and Miss Clare——"

"Will surely be mine; she is in the net already."

"Be guarded! The one who employs you rewards with the liberality of an empress, and visits failure with——"

"I know. I shall not fail—the charm is working!"

Not another word. Edesa went placidly to the dressing-room of Miss Frost; and Signor Sibino Danato glided down the stairs.

CHAPTER VIII.

UPON the banks of the river Panuco in Mexico, stood an ancient and capacious building.

At the back of the building, leading to the Panuco, was a flight of stone steps, to enable the residents of the dreary house to embark in a small boat or any other vessel of the kind, to be borne up and down the fair river. It was not often that this was made use of; but at times, mostly at night, a long black boat would glide at a signal to the steps, and receive within its tomb-like interior a tall lady closely enveloped in a black veil.

On a dark moonless night, a short time after the events since related, a somber-looking boat was propelled up to the stone, moss-grown, slimy steps of the house. From beneath the arched covering appeared a man muffled in a cloak, who uttered a few words in Spanish to the boatman; he then gave his hand to a tall female, to whom a younger one clung, and assisted them out of the boat upon the steps; and so guided them into the house, the door having been opened at a signal. They were fol-

lowed by a stout elderly woman, who with open mouth, gazed about her in mute wonder.

The two women who disembarked, proceeded into a spacious hall, and by a corridor to a door at which they halted.

The man tapped three times and then was heard from within the sound of a silver bell; the door was opened by him, and they went slowly and with noiseless step into the room, which was dimly lighted.

At a table a lady was seated, dressed in black velvet; she was of commanding stature; her face was pale, but remarkably handsome. She did not look old, there was stern character in her appearance which produced the same effect.

"You have returned, Rocco."

"To your commands, Madam Vistula," responded the man.

"And you, Leonore?" she said to the elder of the two females.

"I am here, madam," replied the woman quietly.

"Who have you with you?" asked the lady, eyeing with a curious gaze, the young girl, who kept close to the side of her companion.

"Eva," returned the woman.

"Eva?" repeated the lady, as if trying to recollect to whom the name belonged. "Eva, let me see your face, child."

Leonore, with little ceremony, removed the veil which had been kept thickly folded over the face of her young companion, and revealed the pale face of Eva Letton, but as lovely as ever.

The lady gazed upon her face with eager interest. She pursued each lineament with curious inspection ; but at length, with a sigh, she said : “ How fair and beautiful ! How very beautiful ! One more inheritor of that fatal gift, the curse and destroyer of the happiness of our sex ! ”

She pressed her hand over her eyes, a shudder ran through her frame.

“ Madam Vistula, don’t you know the face ? ”

“ No,” she replied.

A smile of triumph passed rapidly over the woman’s features, and then she said, “ This is Eva Letton.”

“ Eva Letton—your child, Leonore ? ” exclaimed the lady in great surprise, rising to her feet.

“ Yes,” replied Leonore.

Eva started back to look with astonished eyes on the placid face of her who had made the announcement.

She would gladly have given up half her life to have been able to fling herself in her mother’s arms, and have felt herself pressed to that mother’s breast. She clasped her hands, and said in tones of entreaty:

“You—you—are my mother?”

“Why not? Why should I not be your mother?”

“Mother, dear mother!” said Eva, and she would have thrown herself into her arms, but Leonore stopped her.

“We must have no scenes here, Eva. The madam does not approve of scenes.”

“No,” replied the madam, still looking at Eva with an interest she could not account for. “Tell me, Leonore, do I understand rightly, that your daughter has been living near Hilliard Hall?”

“Upon the estate, madam, with my husband, Jasper.”

“And doubtless knows well, by sight, the members of the Hilliard family?”

“Well, madam.”

“I am glad of that. I will talk with her at another time respecting them. I have one question to ask, which may lose nothing in importance by being asked now. Do you know the eldest son—Mr. Ryle Hilliard—do you know him, Eva?”

Poor Eva, her heart swelled as though it would burst.

After a minute's pause, the madam with a fixed stare said: “Why do you not answer me, girl?”

Leonore had watched Eva closely, too; she per-

ceived her emotion: and though she knew not its exact cause, she had a shrewd suspicion of the real state of the case. She grasped Eva by the hand, as though to put her on her guard, and to conceal her emotions; and then, turning to Madam Vistula: "Your pardon, madam, we have traveled rapidly, and continuously. Eva is unaccustomed to fatigue.

"The whole affair is a great surprise to her. She is overcome and seems likely to faint with the over-exertion. Will you, madam, permit me to retire with her, and as soon as I have assisted her to retire, I will return and make my report. I have matters of importance to communicate to you; so also has Rocco; I will soon return again."

"The girl does look pale. You can go."

Leonore Letton led Eva out of the room. The madam looked after her and muttered: "She is wonderfully beautiful. Her face is cast in no common mold, it is clear. Why have I this pain in my heart when she is by—as even now I think of her? It is very strange! Yet it seems that some fleeting expression there is known to me of something once familiar, once dearly loved in time long past. Ha! Leonore asked me if I knew the face?—where—where have I seen that heavenly expression? Oh, this ache at my heart! What can it mean? I must inquire into this. She, the

daughter of Leonore Letton? I'll know who she really is. What, can this Leonore have a secret from me? I'll fathom it, though I have to cut down into her heart for it."

She sat musing for a few minutes, then she suddenly roused herself, and turned her face to a dark corner of the room, where Rocco stood in the shadow watching her.

"Come here, Rocco, and tell me what you have done."

Then Rocco went into a long statement, to which she listened with considerable attention.

"Are you sure of the people in whom you have placed dependence?" she inquired anxiously.

"Perfectly. Edesa hates better looking women than herself, particularly if their position is higher than hers, and will be tempted, out of this feeling, to accomplish their downfall. Still she loves money—she is avaricious—she will sell her soul for it, piecemeal. Can I say more?"

"And Danato?"

"He is very handsome and fertile in expedient; he will dare destruction to accomplish his desires. He will plan, plot, and persevere, in his purpose, without being turned from it by discouragements, however numerous. He has seen Clare Hilliard, he knows you wish to humble and bring to the dust,

Randle Hilliard, her father, and through her he will accomplish your desire."

"It is yet to be done," she said. "Tell Signor Danato not to let the need of gold stand in his way. I will secure to him all he may possibly require, to succeed in his undertaking; but I'll need proof—a letter, perhaps written by her, to show to her father. Oh, 'twill be a big revenge!"

She paused, and then said, "Does Leonore know of your discovery of the body of Jasper Letton?"

"No, madam, and her daughter has not once alluded to the supposed murder of her father; has not even mentioned his name."

A grim smile lighted up the woman's face. "That will be revenge; that will be a blow indeed to the proud man. Oh, could poison or the knife bring me such satisfaction as this?"

"She has her secret, too, and that must be mine," muttered the madam. Then she added, "We must learn from Jasper's own lips the story of his injury. You must go to New York and bring him here as soon as he is able to bear the journey. I have him in my power, and he must do all that I command. I will work the destruction of the house of Hilliard. Leave me, Rocco; I will see you in the morning."

Rocco glided away like a guilty spirit, and Leonore entered and talked for an hour with the madam.

When she left her, it was with words of seeming devotion on her lips; but when the door was closed, there was a glitter in her eye, and a growl of hate escaped her, which did not say much for her attachment to Madam Vistula.

CHAPTER IX.

MADAM VISTULA after the interview, kept in her room for some days. The only communications made beyond its limits, were that Leonore should pay scrupulous attention to her daughter Eva, and display the greatest care in her endeavors to restore her to health, but that she was not to present herself to the madam until she was summoned to attend her.

Rocco was dispatched to New York, the madam giving him his final instructions, and then retired within the secrecy of her private boudoir.

On the third night of the arrival of Eva Letton at the dark house on the river bank, the madam at the dead hour of midnight stood at the bedside of Eva, closely and earnestly looking at the face of the sleeping girl as she lay in heavy and feverish slumber.

To whom had such a face belonged? Oh! where had she seen it?

There was no response on the part of her memory.

She saw a fine gold chain around the sleeping girl's neck from which a jeweled pendant hung. The madam placed the light where its beams were hidden, and kneeling by the bed, removed from the chain the object she had detected. Having obtained it, she hastened with it to her room, and when there, turned the light full upon it to examine it closely. She was not surprised on touching a spring to see it fly open, nor astonished to find the portrait of a young and handsome man; but she started when she saw the features.

"It is he, he, himself," she exclaimed, in agony, "he, as first I saw him!"

She staggered, and sank upon a chair almost fainting.

Again and again she gazed upon it, and even while she grated her teeth with intense malice at bitter remembrances, the salt, scalding tears forced themselves down her cheek.

"I loved him so—I did love him so, I would have perished for him with a smile, had he been but kind to me—had he affected to return it. No! I would not have seen his dissimulation if it had grinned in my eyes. It would have been enough to have heard him say only that he loved me. No degradation held me back from doing, daring all he could have asked of me. He knew it—he must have known

it; yet he scorned, spurned me when he was tired of me! Oh, but I will have my revenge. The mystery about this girl grows painful: it must be solved."

She turned the picture, and at the back was written, in a neat hand—"Ryle Hilliard—a gift to his own Eva."

"So!" she ejaculated. "Here, at least, is one solution. "This, then, is the portrait of the son; and Eva loves him—that is transparent. Does he love her? That is another question. It is so easy for a man to win a woman's heart upon a shallow pretense. Yet he may love her or be made to do so; and here I may have, within my grasp, one piece of exquisite torture for that proud heart; and I will use it to its utmost extent. I must know her history, and then learn where Ryle Hilliard at this moment is, and bring him here."

Leaving her lamp where she had placed it, she stole to Eva's room, and gently restored the jewel to its place, and glided noiselessly from the room.

The next morning she sent for Leonore. She entered and found the madam as pale and collected as ever.

"Leonore!" she said slowly, and with emphasis, "Whose child is this girl you call Eva Letton?"

"I have told you, madam." she replied calmly.

“That she is yours?”

Leonore shrugged her shoulders, but remained silent.

“And Jasper Letton’s?”

Leonore remained silent.

“And Jasper Letton’s?” repeated the madam.

“No.”

“Then she is a child of shame.”

“She is.”

There was another pause; then said the madam,
“does Jasper know of this?”

“No.”

“But you can prove its truth?”

“I can.”

“Enough; you may go and devote your attention to the recovery of your daughter’s health, and her good looks. When I require your presence I will give you plenty of time. Exert yourself to make her cheerful, and do everything to gratify any reasonable wish she may have.”

Leonore retired slowly. As she closed the door once more, that look of fierce hatred she had before displayed, animated her features, and then she caused it to disappear and made her way to Eva’s room.

Some time elapsed, and Rocco made his appearance at the dark house on the bank of the river. This time he had Jasper with him.

She sat in her darkened room, and received him in the same stately manner as usual. "I am glad to see you, Mr. Letton, and must congratulate you on the fortunate discovery of your body by Rocco, and also your subsequent recovery. You still look ill!"

"Weak, madam, nothing more," he replied.

"I am glad of it; you have served me for years and well."

"You know your daughter is here. Will you see her?"

"Oh, yes I will see her at once."

The madam sent for Eva, desiring to speak with her alone, in the room adjoining the one Jasper was in. Eva, frightened and miserable entered the apartment.

The madam almost ran toward her, she took the girl's cold hand, and led her to a seat. Eva could not help noticing with astonishment the change in the madam's dress.

Her black dress was discarded; and she was robed in a dress of dark purple tint, trimmed with gold, set in with jewels, the material of her dress being of the finest Genoa velvet.

Eva thought that she had never seen anything so grand and beautiful as this lady.

"Prepare yourself, Eva, for what I have to say."

You believed your father, Jasper Letton, was murdered. It was not so."

Eva clutched her closely, and stared in her eyes. The madam almost staggered under her glance.

"He is alive. And if you promise to be good, you shall soon see him here in Mexico."

Eva gazed in bewilderment at the madam. Could what she heard be true?

"And the one you thought struck the blow, is not guilty; it was some vile wretch, who to pay some act of vengeance, stabbed him."

"Oh my father, my father, this is happy news, to know I will see you again in life."

Madam Vistula had not been idle; she had a great object in view, and to reach the goal, Eva must be made one of the powerful tools to gain her point.

The madam had given orders for an outfit for Eva, that would do credit to a princess; nothing should be spared that would add to her lovely young beauty.

Instead of the madam taking Eva to her father, she called a maid and charged her to assist Miss Letton to dress for a drive. Meanwhile she sent word for Jasper to call at another time, as Eva was engaged, and would not be at liberty for some time.

The madam was almost overcome, when Eva made her appearance ready for the drive; she looked like a young queen of beauty and grace in her ele-

gant carriage costume. It was with a feeling of pride and wonder, as she stepped into the carriage and was borne away.

As they proceeded on their way, the cathedral attracted Eva's attention: And the madam ordered the carriage to stop so they could pay a visit. They passed through one of the three great doorways, into the cathedral.

Eva was at first awe-stricken by the immensity and grandeur of the interior; but in a moment after, she clutched the madam's arm, who saw her gazing with astonishment upon a young and handsome man, who was absorbed in contemplating the beauties of a statue.

The madam looked, with eager anxiety at his face, which was pale and thin; but she saw in an instant that it was the same as the portrait she had discovered so close to Eva's heart.

CHAPTER X.

THE madam, when she saw the object upon which the attention of Eva was riveted, was as much affected as her young and beautiful companion. The pale face of Ryle caused an agitation in her frame even more powerful than the recognition of the portrait she had discovered in Eva's possession had done.

Although a slave to her passions, the madam, like most persons similarly the victims of such baneful influence, had the power of controlling their visibility.

At the moment she recognized Ryle she had hardly strength to sustain herself. Yet immediately she was proudly erect. She hurried Eva, who was almost paralyzed with conflicting emotions, to another part of the building. With remarkable self-possession she proceeded to point out to her portions of the magnificent edifice. Her words fell on unheeding ears, for Eva's attention was too much distracted by the sudden meeting with Ryle, to be affected or moved by aught else; when she was hurried from the spot where she stood—not re-

luctantly, for she would not have encountered him there, to speak with him—she had a kind of misty sense that the madam was describing to her the wonders of the great paintings; but it was not till she was once more in the carriage, that she was conscious of her position.

Ryle Hilliard had been in Mexico three days; to him it seemed scarcely less than three years. What to do with himself he knew not—cared not! He was surrounded with an atmosphere of gloom and horror which appeared impenetrable. He could think of nothing but the grim corpse of Jasper, slain by his hand, and Eva believing him to be the murderer of her father. He had been some time in the cathedral. It was one of the first places he had visited, and then he had entered it more by accident than design. Whether it was the softened light, the religious character of the building the sweet and solemn strains of sacred music, which for the time alleviated the asperity of his affliction—or that it was the work of exhausted nature is of little import; he experienced more calm than he had since his arrival, and was able once more to chain his thoughts down to mark out his future.

He was roused from his fit of abstraction by a hand roughly laid upon his shoulder; and a voice, something above a whisper, said in his ear: “What,

Ryle Hilliard, are you going to tumble everything overboard, and change into a sculptor?"

Ryle turned quickly, and exclaimed with surprise, "Bob Brent?"

"That same young individual at your service," replied a young, elegantly-dressed man, shaking him by the hand; and who then added, with an air of concern: "Why, my old classmate, what's in the wind? You look as white as the figure-head of the Flying Dutchman! You are not going to turn parson are you?"

Ryle smiled faintly, and said, as the echo of Bob Brent's voice caused several persons engaged in devotion to raise their heads and look at them: "Come with me! this is hardly the place to hold a conversation in; and I want to have a talk with you, Bob."

"And I with you, Ryle," said Bob.

When out in the open air, Bob said, "Ryle, it seems, when I left New York, your highly-respected but braced and trussed-up parent, was bombarding that moral and virtuous city with rewards for your recovery. And now old fellow, where are you bound?"

"Do not ask me, Bob. I cannot—dare not answer you," returned Ryle earnestly.

"Why not, Ryle?" exclaimed Bob. "You

know me well, and I know I have a true friendly interest in you; you are in distress—I knew it as soon as I clapped my eyes on you in the church yonder. If you do not wish to make a confidant of me, of course I will not put another question to you; but you will find me trustworthy, if you try.”

“Bob, I am sure of it,” replied Ryle. “I know not at this moment, any one upon whom I could frankly and confidently rely as yourself—but you must excuse me at this moment. We shall see each other during our stay frequently, for I am stopping at the Yucatan House; give me a little time then, most probably I will make a clean breast of it to you.”

“Be it so,” replied Bob. He was about to add something to this remark, when he was interrupted by a Sister of Charity, who stepped between him and Ryle. She was very fair, and looked as though her flesh was made of wax, it was so transparent.

“Pardon me, sir?” she said. “Your name is Hilliard?”

“It—it—is,” he replied, with some hesitation, looking at her in surprise.

“You are the eldest son?”

He bowed.

“Ryle Hilliard?”

Again he bowed.

She appeared for an instant to be inwardly convulsed, and with a sob, said, "The Yucatan House is your present abode."

"For a short time," responded Ryle, regarding her with no little astonishment.

"Will a communication there reach you?" inquired the sister hurriedly.

"Of what nature?" he asked.

"Oh, ask not now," she returned. "It is of much importance to you. If you knew, your impatience would make you mad ere it reached you. Adieu," she abruptly concluded, as with a shudder she perceived a tall dark woman had stopped, and was also looking at Ryle with eager scrutiny. The Sister of Charity folded her veil closely round her as this woman approached, completely shrouding her features, and moved rapidly away.

Ryle looked after the retreating figure of the sister, observing that she entered the cathedral swiftly, as if being pursued, and then turned to his friend, who was looking on with some curiosity.

"What can this mean, Bob?" he exclaimed.

"Don't know," he replied, "but look, over there is another woman looking at you;" and by an inclination of his head he directed his attention to

where a woman was standing regarding him with a fixed stare. He returned her settled gaze with a similiar look of inquiry, but he did not know her.

Suddenly she walked toward him, and said, "Mr. Ryle Hilliard, I seek an interview with you."

"How do you know my name, madam?"

"No matter," she replied coldly. "I will prove my right to prefer this request to you, if you will grant me the opportunity."

"I do not know you. Who are you?" he asked.

She looked for a moment at Bob Brent, and then, in a low tone, said, "Leonore Letton."

He staggered back, as if struck by a blow and gasped out, "The mother of——"

"The same," she quickly responded, not giving him time to utter the name of Eva.

He drew her with some excitement, a few steps from his friend.

"What have you to say to me?" he asked.

"Nothing, here, see who comes!" she cried hurriedly. "To-morrow night at eight, in the vestibule of the church—I will be there."

The next instant she hurried away, hastily concealing her features under her veil.

"Who comes?"

He turned in the direction in which she had looked when she uttered those words; and there he saw—standing stiff as a statue, his face turned toward him—Jasper!

There could be no mistake in that grim figure—tall, erect—that pale, yet with the same look it had worn when he, with a sudden blow, swept it from his sight in the gloomy woods at Hilliard Hall. He uttered a cry, and was about to bound toward the object which fascinated his gaze to ascertain whether he, whom he stood charged with having murdered yet lived, when his friend suddenly caught him by the arm and swung him round. He stood face to face with a Spaniard, evidently of distinguished rank, both by a studied elegance of manner and perfect finish of dress.

“Allow me to introduce you to one of my earliest associates, my dear friend,” exclaimed Bob; and then said: “San Juan Alzemora, permit me to present you to Ryle Hilliard of Hilliard Hall, Roseglen. You must do the rest yourselves, you know each other now.”

“I am proud of the honor,” exclaimed San Juan in a tone calculated to be agreeable to young men of somewhat free manners, untrammelled by the conventionalities of high society. “Your reputation has traveled before you, Mr. Hilliard. I was

informed of your arrival, and I am indeed pleased that my young friend Bob has given me so early an opportunity of making your acquaintance, which, with your permission, it is my purpose to improve; for I shall argue with you upon the propriety of putting aside for the remainder of the day, whatever engagement you may have made, and entreat you to finish it with me."

The eyes of Ryle during this speech wandered to the spot where he had seen Letton standing. He was convinced that it was him, he could not be so deceived as to mistake a stranger for him; but he was gone; his mind was in a tumult, one event happening so rapidly upon another, it bewildered him. It was with the greatest difficulty he could attend to what was addressed to him. Bob seeing Ryle's distraction said, "I don't believe that Hilliard has any engagement and I am sure I have not. I think I may therefore, in the name of my friend and on my own part, say that we will place ourselves at your command."

"I shall be gratified with the honor," said Ryle.

"I was just on my way to call upon a lady friend, so would be delighted to have your company. I am sure you will be pleased with the lady. She gives brilliant entertainments; the fashion and beauty of Mexico are present on these occasions, and I assure

you that you will be much gratified by your visit."

"Really, Mr. Alzemora," exclaimed Ryle, "I feel much honored; will you favor me with the name of the lady?"

"Madam Vistula."

"I do not know her."

"She is well known in Mexico; somewhat eccentric, beautiful, and enormously wealthy. She is fascinating in manner, and having formed an acquaintance with her, I shall be mistaken if you do not become a frequent guest at her house."

"Of course you will go, Ryle," exclaimed Bob.

Ryle mused for a few moments. At first his impulse was to decline it—not feeling that he could mix in society until the question respecting Letton was cleared up. But he hesitated to do this for several reasons, the principal of which was his desire to avoid suspicion and questions, which seclusion would not fail to raise—for he, before the events which had happened at the Hall, had been as light and free-hearted as Bob himself. So he said: "I cannot go with you to-day for certain reasons of my own; perhaps in a few days I can accept the invitation and shall feel honored in receiving the invitations thus graciously proffered to me. Should any unforeseen event arise to prevent me availing my-

self of it, I hope it will be considered an event over which I have not had control."

The three started for a day's amusement elsewhere.

At night on his return to his hotel, Ryle in profound surprise, found a letter addressed to him. He tore it open, and found it to be an invitation to Madam Vistula's, for that day week.

There was also another letter upon the table, folded, and addressed to him; he tore it open and read, "Remember your appointment in the church. You have much to hear that will surprise you. You are surrounded by wiles designed to entrap you—enemies who purpose your destruction. Beware! Fair speech but too often is the cloak which covers a foul heart."

Ryle read and re-read this note. It was impossible to divine its meaning, and he retired to rest, exhausted and bewildered with the events of the day.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EFFORTS to undermine Mr. Hilliard's peace had already commenced, and the plot was aided by the accidental circumstances of Ryle falling passionately in love with Eva. We have yet to detail the progress of the design by which the vast wealth accumulated during a long minority, were both to be wrested from him.

And why?

From one false step—one fatal error, to which the human race alike are subjected—and which, to retrieve—if ever the attempt is successful—is almost the labor of a life—a life which, in its passage to the grave does not reach its goal divested of the traces stamped upon it by the consequences of the grievous mistake.

In the lower part of New York City, there is a house situated in a rather questionable street; the house is familiarly known among a certain class, as the "Thieves' Friend." To this quarter, Rocco Giuseppi, the confidential servant of Madam Vistula accompanied by a short man, dressed in black; he

was a lawyer, and a sharp one. His name was Grasp. He trotted at the side of Rocco; who, having deposited Jasper Letton in Mexico, was, according to order, again in New York, on a special mission.

As they walked on, Rocco said: "You are quite sure with respect to this man?"

Grasp grinned.

"He was introduced to me by a customer upon whom I can rely," he replied with a wink.

"You say he is prepared to swear that he saw Ryle Hilliard slay his father's steward, Jasper Letton; and that he is in a position to prove it?"

"I do!"

"And it was your intention to have endeavored to bring that young man to the bar of justice?"

"Well—a—you see, that would have depended upon circumstances. Such was not the actual object of my client. You know, my dear foreign gentleman, that at times, very handsome sums are given to persons, who can do so. Again, others, whose silence is worth purchasing, will remain as still as the grave if they are properly—I say properly—remunerated, for a close mouth."

"Well."

"Well, the solution is easy enough. My client has two weaknesses; spirits, and the fair sex. He

has a taste for luxurious indulgence ; and he has not at present, money enough to gratify his appetites ; but he wishes to have it. Now if he were to cause Mr. Ryle Hilliard to be apprehended, and the fellow were to be tried, found guilty, and hanged, my client would have no better opportunity of indulging his expensive fancies than he has at this moment. But, as it is quite possible that Mr. Ryle Hilliard might entertain an objection to an exposure, and its consequent risks, my client entertained the not unreasonable notion, that, to avoid the disagreeable alternative, Mr. Ryle or his father, would invest a sum sufficient to enable my client to kill himself as fast as possible ; for, unless my client has the constitution of a rhinoceros, such must be the inevitable result of his proceedings. So, if put in the unlimited command of money——”

“Your visit to Mr. Hilliard’s house on Fifth avenue, was to effect such an arrangement ?”

“Decidedly. I would have endeavored, on a consideration—because, you know sir, the labor of men’s brains is worth something—to have induced the father to have advanced this man a good round sum ; showing him that by so doing he would effectually close the fellow’s mouth, as he would drink so long as the money lasted, and must die of excess before it had all run out.”

“Ah! You did not see Mr. Hilliard?”

“No! He was out of New York; but the good lady, Edesa, who directed me to you, assured me that you would quite supply the place of Mr. Hilliard.”

“She was right. I will pay you better than he would, and you must serve me.”

“In business, sir the maxim is, ‘The best pay should be best served.’ Pay me well, I’ll serve you well.”

“Work body and soul for me, and your pay shall exceed your most avaricious expectations,” exclaimed Rocco, with forcible emphasis.

Lawyer Grasp was not religious. He banished the teachings given him by his parents, and took up with that of cheating, trickery, and getting the best of everybody. He knew or had heard that the devil walked abroad upon the earth, occasionally flying off suddenly with the outrageously sinful; and he knew that if a list were made out of the worst sinners, his name would be there in some part, perhaps near the top. He had a floating remembrance that there were legends in which his satanic majesty was represented as offering unlimited wealth to those who would work body and soul for him. It was when Rocco Giuseppi placed his sallow face close to his—glared at him with

large black eyes possessing unnatural brilliancy, and hissed into his ear the promise to richly remunerate him if he consented to work, body and soul for him.

Grasp felt a cold vibration about his scalp, which proceeded, by way of the nape of his neck, down to his very heels.

The devil on earth was surely a fable, but then it might not be; and his mysterious-looking, sallow-visaged companion, was by no means unlike the pictures he had seen of the gentleman in black, might have sought him out as having a claim upon his immortal part.

Rocco griped him by the wrist, and he thought he would drop on the muddy pavement; but in another moment he felt relieved on hearing the Italian say: "I too, have some business to transact in which Mr. Randle Hilliard is deeply involved, and I need the services of a crafty, subtle lawyer, to accomplish the purpose I have in view. Your part will be quite legitimate, as respects your profession; but I must have the strictest confidence in you, and you must pause at nothing to win the cause."

Lawyer Grasp gave a sigh of relief; and another glance at Rocco's face assured him. He was not so like the evil one, after all.

"I will do all you require," he said, with a cun-

ning leer; "but it is to be understood that my labor is not to be paid by the scale of the usual professional charges."

"Decidedly not. Be under no uneasiness about payment: that shall be all you can desire. Tell me—this man, Wolf Scrubb, whom we are about to visit, knows all the people in the village near Hiliard Hall well, does he not?"

"He was born in the village I believe."

"Then no doubt he knows all the inhabitants?"

"The greater part of them, to a certainty."

"That is good."

"Ah! but as far as I can gather, their knowledge of him is not fragrant. He has a reputation, it is true; but I am doubtful whether, if he were to pay a visit there, the inhabitants would not invite the authorities to receive him—not with any view of honoring his arrival."

"That is of small consequence. I care nothing for that; it is information I want."

By this time they had reached the turn leading to the place they were about to visit. They descended—for their way lay down the street—to the end, and then they paused before a small, wretched-looking house, and knocked twice. There was no answer. He pushed at the door, and found it give.

“Wait a moment,” he said to Rocco. “I will just run upstairs, and see if my client is in.”

He dived into the dark and narrow passage, and disappeared. Within a minute he reappeared at the very maximum of his speed, followed by a huge bull-dog, which appeared animated by the most determined intention to fasten on him, and pin him to the ground. He caught Rocco by the arm, and ran round him, followed by the dog, at a terrific rate ; but such was his fright and frantic speed, that he absolutely overtook the dog, kicked him violently, trod on him, and fell sprawling in the mud, of which in that quarter, there is always more than a sufficiency. Another moment, and the dog, aware of his advantage, pinned him to the ground.

Rocco shouted expletives in Italian, and struck at the dog with his cane, but without producing the slightest beneficial effect. The worst of the matter was that the shouts of Rocco, and the wild bark of the dog had attracted the attention of other dogs in the place, and they commenced barking and hurrying to the scene of action to take part in it.

At the same time heads came out of windows, and men out of doorways, among them, one from that at the door of which Grasp had knocked. He had his hands in his pockets, and seeing his dog engaged, whistled softly, not to call off the dog, but to express his surprise.

Rocco caught sight of him and shouted, "Call off your beast—he will kill him."

"Don't know him," answered the man coolly.

"He is a lawyer!" screamed Rocco.

"So much the worse for him," replied the man.

"Ah! ah! but your lawyer! He is Grasp—Grasp, man, Grasp—you know Lawyer Grasp."

The man slowly drew near and looked down; then he saw Grasp's face, and heard him yell, "Buxton, call off your dog! Call him off!—he'll murder me, call him off."

"Well, well!" cried Buxton, with another whistle; "It's himself, and no mistake."

He took a fierce grip of the dog's neck with one hand, while with the other he seized his tail and drew it toward his mouth, and instantly indented it as hard as he could. The dog retained his hold for an instant, and then with a howl he let go. The moment he did so the man flung him some distance, kicked him in the ribs, and cried, "Get in, Toby! Go in, you brute! Not know a gentleman from a tramp!"

Lawyer Grasp was now conducted into the house. He was covered with mud, but fortunately for him, the dog had seized upon the collar of his coat, which was much torn; the lawyer himself was not hurt, only frightened.

When something like equanimity was restored, Rocco desired the company of Wolf.

After some delay, he made his appearance. He was recovering from a debauch obtained from the proceeds of a burglary ; his hair rough and his face dirty, his eyes bloodshot. Rocco shrank from him ; a more fearful ruffian he had never encountered. Still he was necessary to the purpose he had in view, and it would not admit of being frustrated.

After preliminary introductions and some explanations were entered into, Wolf—quite unconscious that Rocco and his companions down at Hilliard Hall, with a very different object, had removed the body of Jasper Letton, gave his version of what he considered to be the murder. It was, in substance the same as that which he had repeated to Mr. Hilliard, but grossly exaggerated. When he had concluded, Rocco said :

“ We must at present let the matter rest altogether.”

“ But what am I to do for gilt ? I can’t starve !” cried Wolf.

“ Leave that to me,” replied Rocco : “ I will supply you with money ; but understand, as I will for some time require your services, I will only let you have enough to keep you sober and respectable. When our cause is gained and we triumph, then you shall receive a very large sum of money.”

The ruffian shook his head.

"*When!*" he repeated with emphasis. "It may last till doomsday! I'm for short life and a merry one! shan't wait!"

"The cause must be won or lost at no distant date," urged Rocco.

"What is the cause?" he asked.

"Why, to prove that Mr. Hilliard is not the rightful owner of Hilliard estate."

"And how'll you do it?" sneered Wolf.

"Leave that to me. You are acquainted with all the people around the estate and the adjoining village?"

"I should think so."

"Are there any who can remember what took place forty years ago?"

"A few. Most of them were babies about that time, I was."

"Those few are old people, of course?"

"Of course."

"They are to be got away, I presume, or silenced."

"Yes; but I ain't going to do no scragging job, I can tell you."

"I shall not want you," returned Rocco quickly.

"What I want of you is to give me the names and the history of those persons residing in or near

Hilliard estate who are likely to recollect the circumstances which may have happened in the first years of Mr. Hilliard's infancy. They must either be bought to swear whatever we may put into their mouths, or they must be made to emigrate. You understand?"

"They must be prevented, you see, my dear Mr. Scrubb," exclaimed Lawyer Grasp, a little hoarsely, "from appearing for the other side; so that Mr. Hilliard will find the greatest possible difficulty in proving that he is himself."

"Oh, I see," said Wolf. "Then what you want me to do is to tog myself out decently, go there and keep sober, come the reformed dodge, be very 'spectable in my 'pearance, and sound all the folks I know as to whether they will, on being tipped, learn a lesson and say it afore a judge."

"You have exactly hit it, my friend."

"Yes," observed Rocco, "that will be one part of your duty, certainly; but there will be other things required of you."

"Oh, I daresay! You've got the *rightful* heir, of course."

Rocco hesitated.

"To be sure! to be sure!" cried Grasp.

"That's a pity," said Wolf.

"Why?" exclaimed Rocco and Grasp at the same time.

"Because I know of one who'd be a stunner for that game."

"Who is he?" asked both in a breath.

"A couple of dollars and I'll drop it to you."

Grasp was driving the bargain and handed Wolf the money, saying, "If we don't consider the person, you will return the money now in your hands."

Having pocketed the money Wolf said: "You see the last Mr. Hilliard was, when a young man just afore he came of age, a wild chap, rather; and there was a pretty girl in our village, named Leonore. It was said that she was in love with the young man and he in love with her. When he was in New York, just afore his marriage, Leonore was in New York too, and it was said she married a man by the name of Menton, just about the same time that Mr. Hilliard married. Mr. Menton died about sixteen months after the marriage and Leonore came back to her mother; and in regular time she had a child—a boy."

"Good," said Rocco.

"Well, about the same time Mrs. Hilliard had a child—a boy, too; and as she was delicate, her husband got her to send for Leonore Menton to the Hall, and she was wet-nurse to the two boys—consequently, they were foster brothers."

"Admirable, my friend," exclaimed Rocco
"And this foster-brother, where is he?"

"Why, he was a little rackety when a boy—we was boys together—but he was unlucky, and the government sent him to Sing-Sing. But he served his time out, and has been back here a little while, looking out for a lay. I'll bring him to you any time you like to name."

"Is he like Mr. Hilliard?"

"As two peas. He'd make just as good a one as the other."

"What is his present name?"

"Jerry Menton."

"And his mother?"

"She is in Hilliard Village."

"Any other family?"

"One—a daughter, named after her mother, who's not been seen for years. Mrs. Menton is old and might be flurried into the belief that she changed the children by accident. I know a woman, the right age, who'll swear she saw it done, if you tip her."

"Secure her! It shall be done!" exclaimed Rocco. "But first bring to me, at the rooms of Lawyer Grasp, your friend Jerry Menton. He will enter into the scheme I suppose?"

"Rather! I'll bring him. Let's see—this is Monday. What do you say to Friday night at eight?"

“That will do. I will be there,” said Rocco.

“At the same time I will furnish you with money and instructions ; but you must keep sober.”

“All right,” said Wolf.

And so they rose and took their departure, Lawyer Grasp to return to his rooms, to execute and form documents ; and Rocco to hold a conference with Signor Sibino Danato.

CHAPTER XII.

LET us return to the movements of Mr. Randle Hilliard, Ryle's father.

Upon his arrival in Mexico, he made his way to President Colima, with whom he was well acquainted, having in years past been on terms of intimate friendship with him, and upon inquiry he found him at home and alone.

The servant on ushering Mr. Hilliard into the presence of the president, he, briefly announcing Mr. Hilliard, retired, and a tall, elderly gentleman, advanced in years, but the very ideal of a man in high authority, rose up from a table at which he was seated writing, and, extending his hand to the caller, said: "Mr. Hilliard, I am glad to renew an acquaintance which has been interrupted for years, checked from some fault of mine or yours. If I am to blame, believe me, the business of my country has so absorbed my constant attention, that I have not had an opportunity of cultivating and improving an intimacy with a dear friend; if the cause rests with you, sit down, and explain to me why I have not seen you, heard from, or of you for years."

"I respond to your kind welcome, Colima," replied Mr. Hilliard, "for I am glad again to see you after so long a separation. I doubt if either are to blame, that we have not met or corresponded for so long a time. Do you remember our last meeting, Colima?" asked Randle, in a subdued voice, a slight quiver perceptible in it.

"Let us talk of the present," said the president. "The past has bitterness for the best of us, even though it gilds the agreeable and softens the afflicting. What brings you to Mexico? Not the simple desire to see me, of course, but perhaps some matter in which I can be of service to you."

"You have guessed it; I am here upon an important errand, and I come to you to help me."

"Command me."

"I wish to be known here by a different name than Hilliard."

"A different name?"

"Yes. I have a powerful motive for preserving a strict incognito."

"Randle, you are about to resuscitate matters long since buried. Will this be wise?"

"Colima, I am forced to the course I am pursuing; I am compelled to the step I am taking."

"And perhaps not. Have you taken counsel on the policy of your present move?"

“Of my own heart.”

“In personal matters, generally the worst guide you can follow. Will you submit your case to me? I will give my best advice—quite conscious, by the way, that it is a donation freely, frankly, and usually sincerely offered, but very rarely accepted.”

“I am anxious to explain my position to you; and most ready to profit by your counsel.”

“Proceed.”

“You remember Madam Vistula——”

“Yes! A woman not lightly to be forgotten. What a wonderful diplomatist she would have made; she would have eclipsed the subtle intriguante, the Princess Lienen. Ah! I remember you managed to make her your enemy. How was that?—it has escaped me.”

Randle reddened to the tips of his ears. “The occasion of our disunion is not to the purpose at this moment,” he said hastily. “Let it suffice, she became my relentless enemy; but I believed by a fearful stroke of affliction that befell me, her malignity was sated. I have been in error. She has been quiet only to perfect schemes to compass my destruction. She has commenced putting into operation the plan she has been so long preparing; already am I beginning to feel the deadly character of her machinations; and unless I am active and

prompt, as well as secret, in my efforts to counteract her arts, I shall be enmeshed in her web, and utterly destroyed, without the power to save myself."

"Remarkable skill in artifice has Madam Vistula. I had once a passage with her, but she decidedly defeated me, and to her success I probably owe the fact of not being at this instant an inmate of paradise, or limbo, at least," said Colima.

"The madam resides here yet?"

"She does, at the house on the banks of the river Panuco; I have visited there."

"And I, unhappily."

"To be sure, and will again."

Randle Hilliard shuddered.

"Never!" he said emphatically.

"So I said once in respect to a siren who had tricked me; but my 'never' was of twenty-four hours' duration. Why, Randle you are walking with your eyes open, and your wings folded, in this creature's web! Do you presume the spider will not see you, and visit you?"

"I will not walk into the web, for my eyes are wide open to avoid it; nor will I let the spider know me, Colima; for that purpose do I apply to you for help?"

"You are about to try your skill in disguises.

This woman will be a match for you at this game. I am afraid you do not know her rightly yet."

"I know her cruel subtlety but too well."

"Do you know San Juan Alzemora?"

"No!"

"Ah? you have something to learn, I see. Well, he is a man scrupulously to avoid. There is a connection between him and Madam Vistula I do not altogether comprehend; He is not her *cavaliere servante*, yet he is her humble servant ever. Should he know of your arrival, it would be the same as though you were to confront the madam and say to her, with a bow, 'Your humble servant, madam, here I am in Mexico, at your service.' And should one of her domestics follow you, wherever you went, she would not be more accurately apprised of your movements than she will, should San Juan Alzemora become acquainted with your presence in Mexico. Now, Randle, let me know what you consider to be the proofs of the madam's renewal of her efforts to avenge what I suppose she esteems her wrongs."

"*Her wrongs!*"

"Well that is not to the purpose. Every woman has her 'wrongs:' no matter how much she may deserve the treatment she receives, her own culpability is never taken into account. If she does

not have her own way precisely—dress as she pleases—indulge in every species of gayety for which she feels inclined—she is wronged. Every check to her whims—every curb upon extravagant fancies is put down as wrong. Summed up, they make a total of iniquities which she rarely fails to nurse, dandle and hold up before your eyes whenever occasion offers—even when it does not offer. These are her wrongs!—few women are without them. Ask them, they are at least honest in this. They will say yes, at once. Oh! to be sure the madam has had her wrongs; but she is one of the few women who avenges them with relentless animosity and persecution—but I interrupt your relation. Go on Randle, and remember, the less reticence you display, the greater perhaps my power to serve you.”

Randle related to him the circumstances of his son Ryle falling in love with Eva Letton—of his own decided opposition to it—of the struggle between Ryle and Jasper Letton in the woods—the mysterious disappearance of the body of Jasper—the story of Wolf—the subsequent startling departure of Eva—the flight of his son, and his fruitless efforts to discover him—of the discovery of the detective, of the departure from New York of the woman he had encountered in the cottage, and as far as he could judge, Eva—and subsequently, the

appearance of Letton, yet suffering from the effects of his wound, together with his taking passage for Mexico with an agent of the madam's. As yet there was nothing definite in the attack, but there was the strong foreshadowing of what was in store.

"In short," said President Colima, "the out-works are being assaulted previous to the storming of the citadel."

"Exactly. Now let us see how the case stands. That man, Wolf, is a liar and a scoundrel—no doubt the man who stabbed the steward."

"He?—why?"

"Some old grudge. It is, at least, far more probable than that a well bred young gentleman should commit the act of an assassin."

"Thank you, Colima—thank you, my friend," exclaimed Randle, tears starting to his eyes. "Such an expression in my mind of one so clear-sighted as yourself, is a vast relief to my heart, borne down by the weight of fear that my boy would be guilty in a fit of frenzy, of so dastardly a deed."

"That, in his passion, he felled him to the ground, I doubt not," said Colima; "but then he passed on without looking at him, I would swear. However, let us go on. Your steward has been in the pay of Madam Vistula; all your doings of the past few years are known to her; the girl, his

daughter, may be a tool set on to decoy and capture your son."

"I cannot think that to be true, Colima."

"I would rather believe it is not ; we must not overlook her sudden disappearance from the cottage. The flight of your son I look upon as a natural consequence. He went abroad. Roughing for awhile to wipe off all painful impressions, and he will return ready to meet your views in an alliance—for a marriage with this girl is not to be thought of."

After further summing up the case as it stood, he confessed that there was reason to believe that Madam Vistula intended mischief, and that she must be fought with her own weapons.

"But Randle, you cannot do this unaided. You know Mexico well."

"Alas, too well !"

"That is something ; but it is needful that you should have a companion more keen, acute, subtile and unscrupulous than yourself. I know such a man, whose aid will be invaluable to you. We will take some refreshment, and then we will seek him. You may place implicit confidence in him. He is bound to me to the extent of his life ; he can serve you well and faithfully, and will do so, under my inspiration."

Mr. Hilliard thanked him warmly, he jumped at the proposition ; it was exactly what he required—what he wished ; but he knew of no one to trust—no one competent to help him, and he was much gratified at the prospect of obtaining such an individual.

Refreshment was served up, and during the time it was being partaken of, Mr. Hilliard's mind was completely taken up by the subject on which he was personally interested.

After the two gentlemen had partaken of the repast, they started out in search of the individual, whom the president had promised would be of so great help to Mr. Hilliard. After walking some distance, they turned down a narrow quiet street and paused before a tall house. Having obtained admission, they proceeded slowly and quietly up the third flight of stairs, and stopped before a door at which President Colima gave three taps. The door was opened by a young girl who greeted the president with a smile.

“ Ah ! my little Elsie, is that you ? ”

“ Yes ! it is my poor little self, at your service.”

“ That is good. Is your worthy uncle, Ureas Morelia, at home ? ”

“ Ah ! yes, he is never denied to you, you are his

friend, whom he esteems ; he is always proud to see you, I will announce you."

She soon returned, and led the way through a couple of rooms into a sleeping apartment, and closing a door carefully after her, she approached the wall, which was marked with oaken paneling ; touching a spring, one of the panels flew open, and disclosed a small apartment beyond. Into this the president and Mr. Hilliard made their way ; the panel glided back to its place, leaving the girl Elsie in the sleeping apartment.

The tenant of this singular room was a tall, thin man, with a pale face. His hair was very short, his eyebrows were thin and light, he had no hair on his face, he had a close-fitting black gown on, something like a priest's cassock. His eyelids appeared red from close study, and his appearance was that of a man of science, who buried his life in perusing works of abstruse nature, and of pondering incessantly to find out what it was not possible to discover.

He made a profound bow to the president, expressed his pleasure at the honor of this visit and awaited in silence his commands, prepared to obey them as far as he could.

"This is my friend, Mr. Randle Hilliard. You must serve him as you would me ; in doing so faith-

fully you will find how much you will please me."

"Let my life answer for the zeal I will display in his service," returned Morelia.

"That is enough!" exclaimed Colima. "I am aware that you are acquainted with all parts of Mexico, you know many of its inhabitants, both among the higher classes and the lower, and know how to avail yourself of their interest when you require it. You know San Juan Alzemora?"

Ureas Morelia's eyes fell, his eyebrows contracted, and his teeth slightly grated together. The movement of his features was but slight, but it unfolded much.

"I do know him."

"I do not mean by repute or superficially, but you are acquainted with his inner nature, Morelia," said Colima, expressively.

"I am; his craftiness is not better known to himself."

"You know Madam Vistula, Morelia?"

There was the same convulsion of features, only this time more apparent, in the face of Morelia. Still he had such command over his emotions that the muscles of his face appeared only to suffer.

"I do, sir; I know her and all connected with her. I need tell you no more than that I know all

it can possibly be of advantage to know respecting her."

"Good," replied Colima. "Now mark me, Morelia, my friend, Mr. Hilliard, in times past offended Madam Vistula, and roused her hatred."

"She never forgives," exclaimed Morelia, "nor forgets, until blood has flowed over the conceived injury."

"Madam Vistula has commenced putting into operation some plot she has formed, and my friend would endeavor to counteract her schemes. He will disguise himself and endeavor, by finding out at her headquarters the springs she sets in motion, to intercept them before they reach the objects intended to be injured by them; do you understand?"

"Clearly."

"I wish you to accompany him, to advise, suggest, to act; it must not be known to any that he is in Mexico. I place the whole affair in your skillful hands; Mr. Hilliard will put you in possession of the circumstances that have happened without reserve. You will then know what to do for the best, and as you counsel so will he be guided."

"When are we to begin?"

"To-morrow morning if possible," said Mr. Hilliard.

"No," exclaimed Morelia, "we will wait until to-morrow night. You will leave the whole of your wardrobe in the president's house; I will provide you with a costume in which you will be good enough to attire yourself at the residence of the president. I will be at your service at seven to-morrow evening, and be not surprised, if you find me in no point resemble Ureas Morelia now before you."

Colima laughed.

"Come," said he to Hilliard, "we will leave Morelia to his preparations. At seven we will expect you."

"At seven I will be with you, and in the meantime I will secure rooms for us and bid adieu to my friends."

As soon as they were once more in the street, Colima hailed a coupé, and they returned to the president's residence.

CHAPTER XIII.

“I HAVE written for you,” said Colima, “a very strong letter to an English gentleman, a friend of mine; he resides in the eastern part of Mexico. He will, with the exception of Ureas Morelia be the only person here acquainted with your real name. I must warn you to keep down your patrician feelings. It will be necessary for you to hold them in the tightest subjection; for Morelia will act his part to perfection. He will never remember that you are in reality a gentleman. So long as you act in concert together, you will be to all interests and purposes his secretary; and you must not forget this—he will treat you as such *even when alone*—that is, seemingly alone; for in Mexico it is difficult to know when you are out of the reach of ears you desire not to fill with what you may utter. He will tell you when you may speak freely and with safety. Never attempt to do so unless he should first say it will not be dangerous. You will have to come in contact, face to face, with those who have eagles’ eyes, and detect assumed characters only too quickly.

Be prepared to master all emotion ; and present always to the searching glance, an expression of countenance at once blank and imperturbable."

"I will strive to follow your instructions," replied Hilliard. "It would be madness to do otherwise, seeing how much I have at stake. Tell me, as I shall be thrown much with him, would it not be as well to be in possession of some of the antecedents of Ureas Morelia? By the aid of such knowledge I may be enabled with more confidence to sustain my assumed character."

"There is no necessity for it. This much I will tell you. I have a suspicion that he is a native of Mexico, although he claims to be a Spaniard. With his early life I am unacquainted. Of the latter portion of it I know all. He is a most valuable agent of mine ; has been extremely serviceable to me and very faithful ; at the same time more skillful than any other secret servant I ever employed. Purely political the actions of the past, it can serve no useful purpose to tell you more than that you will find him eminently serviceable, and one more calculated to effect the object you have in view, than any other person you could have selected."

With this assurance Mr. Hilliard was compelled to be satisfied, and he retired to rest, prepared on

the morrow to enter upon the new phase his affairs were taking.

Immediately after he had retired, President Colima rung the bell; and when the servant appeared, he said, "Send James to me."

The man disappeared.

In less than three minutes, a man clad decidedly in English-cut clothes, made his appearance. His face was round and fleshy, his nose somewhat full, and like his lips, large. The expression of his features was what might be termed jolly; and his general appearance that to an ordinary observer would have denoted a man of very moderate qualifications; but there was a quick movement of his small, bright black eyes, which revealed that he was possessed of acuteness and penetration in rather an extensive degree.

Announcing himself, he stood perfectly motionless, while he received his instructions from President Colima.

"James you will leave by the first boat starting for New York City, and on your arrival there, take lodgings in the neighborhood of Fifth avenue, as near Hilliard mansion as you can; make acquaintances with the male servants—or female, for they know most—and let me know from day to day what is going on there, who comes and who goes—there

must be no exception, you understand—from the highest to the lowest, the visitor, the groceryman, the servant, the beggar; and endeavor to ascertain the motive, ostensible and secret, with which such visit is paid. Use your accustomed sagacity, James, and rely upon my appreciation of it.”

James bowed and disappeared.

Toward evening on the following day, President Colima summoned Mr. Hilliard into a boudoir, and there introduced him to a perruquier, who quickly clipped his hair close, fitted him to a wig, trimmed and shaved his whiskers into an entirely different shape, dyed them and his eyebrows and made them turn out of their natural curve, and then he retired. Mr. Hilliard donned his secretary's garb, which was simply the dress of a gentleman, but so cut and arranged as to make him look an entirely different individual. As he surveyed himself, in a full-length pier-glass, he could hardly help looking behind him for the person there reflected, and was quite satisfied with the change.

He returned to the parlor, and as the clock chimed seven, the door was thrown open, and a servant announced:

“Honorable Judge Mountemorris.”

Mr. Hilliard was electrified. Instead of the thin pale being he had seen in Ureas Morelia, he per-

ceived a well-proportioned man enter the room, elegantly dressed. His features wore a smiling air, his luxuriant hair was shining and curly, his whiskers beginning almost with a single hair, increased until they entirely covered his chin. Upon his upper lip was a mustache. The other appointments were faultless, and he looked the honorable to perfection, Mr. Hilliard could not credit that this was Ureas Morelia. He was reassured by the newcomer saying:

“Mr. Walter Van Scott, I presume you have perfected your arrangements. My people have borne the baggage we shall take with us to our rooms; it will be as well to finish your interview with President Colima, and we will then go to them.”

Not a tone, a gesture, and inflexion of the voice, bore the smallest resemblance to those of Ureas Morelia, and Mr. Hilliard could not help, in the gratification he felt at his admirable disguise catching his hand and pressing it.

The Honorable Judge snatched it away and put it to his lips. “In your admiration of the abilities of others,” said President Colima, “You must not forget the claim upon your own, Mr. Hilliard. Remember your warning.”

After the interchange of some suggestions in respect to future communications, the friends took

leave of each other, and were soon in a carriage alone.

“I may speak a few words in my real person here, I presume?”

“You may,” said Morelia; “but I advise you to be careful how you exercise that privilege. If you should do so at a time in a manner likely to lead to a discovery, I will vanish from your side, no more to return to it, as completely as though at best I were but an apparition.”

Mr. Hilliard assented, observing:

“I wish to know if your acquaintance with Madam Vistula led to any event which has raised a spirit of hatred in your heart, and of revenge in hers?”

“Ask me not now. There may come a time when you may know all! I have burried my own griefs and wrongs, and live now, and act only for others. Be assured of this, that you could not have selected one more directly interested in thwarting the designs of this cruel and heartless woman than myself.” He sank back in the carriage as though to prevent further conversation.

By some means, of which Mr. Hilliard was not cognizant, it was known all over Mexico—to use a questionable expression—that the Honorable Judge Montemorris, a wealthy gentleman was on a visit to

Mexico, and that very day the cards of the wealthy, and the distinguished were left at his residence. Alone, Mr. Hilliard presented himself at the house of Mr. Temple, the English gentleman for whom he had a letter of introduction, and, with some difficulty obtained an interview with him.

There were three or four persons in the room when he handed Mr. Temple his letter, and who all watched intently for the shape his features might take, while he perused the missive; but there was no indication that the contents in the slightest degree affected him. He read with complete impassibility of countenance every word; and when he had ended, he looked up at Mr. Hilliard, who endeavored to look cold and immoveable too, and said: "You are Mr. Walter Van Scott?"

"I am."

"Secretary to Honorable Judge Montemorris, newly arrived in Mexico?"

"The same."

Mr. Temple took up a pen, and wrote, with rapidity, a few words upon a sheet of note-paper. He folded it up closely—put it into an envelope and sealed it—addressed it—and handing it, said:

"You give this to Honorable Judge Montemorris, you will say that he will be pleased to open it immediately when you reach your residence."

There was a slightly perceptible difference in the annunciation of the last seven words. The quick ear of Mr. Hilliard caught them ; but he exhibited no outward sign that he comprehended the spirit of what was said to him. He took the letter, and with a bow retired, as he heard Mr. Temple say to one of the gentleman present—"If what you aver be true, sir, my friend here San Juan Alzemora, is laboring under a falsed impression."

Mr. Hilliard looked under his eyebrows, and saw San Juan Alzemora, to whom Mr. Temple was extending his hand, and at a glance, felt he should know him again whenever they met. He observed too, that the eyes of Alzemora were upon him with a most penetrating expression ; but he kept his rigidity of features and his cold constrained manner. Their eyes met ; but Mr. Hilliard turned his away with indifference—an uneasy impression, crossing him that a suspicion had been already raised in the mind of Alzemora that Hilliard was not what he seemed.

He made his way back ; and when alone in his own room, and convinced as well he could be, that he was not observed, he opened the note addressed by Mr. Temple to the Honorable Judge Montemorris. It ran thus :

"Return here in two hours. Come openly ; present to me a letter ; await the rest,"

He descended to the apartment where the Judge was engaged in writing.

“Judge Montemorris,” he said, “the enclosed note was handed to me by Mr. Temple. You will be good enough to write a reply, which I will bear to him.”

The Judge perused it, and immediately scratched a dozen lines upon a sheet a paper, and handing it over to the pseudo Walter Van Scott exclaimed : “you will copy that, and convey your copy, after I have signed it to Mr. Temple.”

He rose from the table, and from a magnificent cigar case, took a cigar, and with Mr. Temple’s note lighted it ; but the cigar was obstinate and would not ignite, until every particle of Mr. Temple’s note was consumed. Upon reaching Mr. Temple’s office, Mr. Hilliard fulfilled his instructions, and was once more ushered in the presence of Mr. Temple, who was this time alone. Closing the door carefully, he ushered Mr. Hilliard into an inner room and closing that door also ; then he said, “Mr. Van Scott, the letter for President Colima has acquainted me with all necessary for me to know. You shall have my best help, but it must not be known that any communing between you and I takes place. Never seek me. I will always let you know when and where to see me. But should you require from me at any

moment prompt or instant aid, the use of the words 'Freedom for the Free' addressed to my secretary, or if he should not be here, and the time night to the porter, will command access to me. You have a most subtle foe, but a most able assistant at your elbows. May you succeed in foiling the machinations directed against your peace." But little more was said, and Mr. Hilliard returned to his residence.

He found upon his return, San Juan Alzemora closeted with the Honorable Judge, and he was introduced to Alzemora as his secretary. "We have met before, I think," exclaimed Alzemora, fastening his eyes intently upon the secretary.

The latter met his eyes firmly, and replied coldly, "I am not conscious of having had that horror."

"At Mr. Temple's, I think!" observed Alzemora, much in the same peculiar tone.

"I visited Mr. Temple this morning upon business, for the Honorable Judge," returned Mr. Hilliard.

"Ah!" said Alzemora, dissatisfied with the answer, but assuming an air of indifference, "I was there on your arrival." Then turning to the judge, he said, "we were speaking of Madam Vistula. Do you know that she has been for some years secluded?"

"Don't know her," drawled the judge.

"Ah! you must make her acquaintance. She is one of the most remarkable women in Mexico."

"Indeed! Old?"

"No. At least, not what women consider old, climacteric 'old'."

"Handsome?"

"Has been lovely; is still beautiful, and looks young, though she must approach forty."

"Ah! rather the shady side of a woman's life Alzemora, to suit my taste."

"She has a young *protege* with her, whose loveliness will compensate for any shortcomings of the madam's, both in youth, beauty—and loveliness."

"Spanish, of course?"

"No, American."

"American! Really, Alzemora, you interest me. A beautiful young American girl is an immense attraction. I am delighted with beautiful American girls, as I am of the choicest efforts of the sculptor. She is a blonde, is she not?"

"A blonde, judge, of the fairest and most delicate kind."

"Exquisite! I would wager an estate. A lovely creature, tied to a hideous name, we may be sure. Horrible names the Americans glory in."

"Her name is Evangeline Letton. Miss Eva-

Letton is the manner Americans have of pronouncing it."

Had an arrow been shot through the heart of Mr. Hilliard he could hardly have been more affected by the utterance of this name. Fortunately, the eyes of Alzemora were not upon him, and he was able to suppress his emotion.

The *nonchalance* of the judge, who knew this to be the young girl with whom Ryle Hilliard had fallen in love, was admirable. He repeated two or three times Eva Letton. "Ah! Alzemora you will be kind enough to present me to her?"

"With pleasure, judge. The madam visits the opera to-night, Miss Letton's father will accompany her. My box is at your service."

"You overwhelm me with obligations, Alzemora; but I have already secured a box for the rest of the season. I will thank you for the introduction only."

"You shall have it."

The judge bowed his acknowledgements, and turning to the secretary said: "Mr. Van Scott, you will accompany me to-night; I may require you."

The secretary bent in acquiescence, and shortly after Mr. Alzemora retired.

That night Mr. Hilliard sat in the judge's box prepared to undergo a tremendous ordeal. He

awaited with patience the arrival of Madam Vistula, whose box the judge had pointed out to him.

At length she appeared, superbly attired, in black with duchess lace. Her head, her neck, her arms, her fingers glittering with diamonds; her skin dazzlingly fair, and her features handsome and bearing no sign that more than thirty happy summers had passed over her head.

By her side sat Eva Letton in a dress of pale blue satin, trimmed with silver. She wore few ornaments; she did not need them she was so fair and lovely without intrinsic aid.

Mr. Hilliard gazed upon her with beaming eyes and throbbing heart. He wondered not at the passion of his son for this extremely beautiful girl; and his heart died within him at the prospect of weaning him from his adoration of so sweet a face.

A buzz of admiration at her enchanting beauty ran through the house, almost immediately she was seated, and Mr. Hilliard was so fascinated that he could not remove his eyes from her.

Suddenly a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a voice hissed in his ear: "A most charming creature this young American girl, Miss Letton! is she not Mr. Van Scott?"

He turned, and saw at his side, scrutinizing him with a searching expression, San Juan Alzemora.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIGNOR SABINO DANATO had well calculated the effect of such words as he addressed to Clare Hiliard, would have upon her mind. A quick and keen reader of female character, he had no difficulty in becoming master of her innocent nature. It was easy to discover how pure her mind was, how chaste her thoughts; that she was a kind, amiable, and self-sacrificing as she was impressible. She possessed great self-abnegation; she thought for others—seemed to live for others. She was most devoutly attached to all the members of her family, and would have hesitated at no personal sacrifice to have secured their happiness. They were, to a certain extent, aware of this; in fact, it was not possible for her to conceal her affections, or for them not to reciprocate it, because it came forth on such unselfish conditions.

Her brother, Ryle, was perhaps registered first in her heart; but then she loved Daisy so tenderly, and Landon so fondly, that really, it would have been hard for her, on examination into the force of her feelings in their favor, to have eliminated the one that stood pre-eminent in her love.

When Sabino Danato, with a fiendish expression of countenance, said with such emphasis in her ear, "I can hate and take a dreadful vengeance—not upon the object of my hate by the knife, but on those they love by poisonous, subtle processes, which would rack, torture, and at least destroy them"—she was oppressed with horror, and from that moment conceived a terrible dread, that unless she conciliated him he would practice his atrocious acts of hatred first upon those whom she loved.

Her active imagination pictured one or the other of her brothers or sisters wasting away, dying piecemeal, by the introduction of some subtle poison in their veins—they, the victims of a line of conduct toward this man, which every instant told her was the proper one for her to pursue.

Out of love for them she shrunk from placing them in such a terrible position; she would endure this man's glances—his snake-like crawl to her side, repulsive as it was to her—rather than, by rousing his anger, cause their destruction.

She lacked what her sister Daisy possessed—moral courage; that as Daisy had done, she should do, openly resent the insidious approaches of the Italian, and so cause him to be expelled from the house, with some special mention to the detectives of the covert threats he had made.

Sabino Danato came with scrupulous punctuality to give the daily lessons, and he contrived that it should in some way touch upon poison, or lead to an opportunity for him to dilate upon the art of poisoning, as studied and practiced, he averred, in various parts of Italy.

The caution given him by Edesa had not been lost upon him, nor was there a chance that it should have been. He was told somewhat abruptly by the steward, that Miss Daisy for the present declined taking her Italian lessons, and when the young lady passed him, it was with a look of haughty contempt which made him writhe again. He was obliged, not only to swallow his ire, but to act more circumspectly toward Clare, for fear she, too, should dismiss him in haughty scorn, and thus ruin the whole project which brought him there.

Sabino Danat performed the task allotted to him well. He made no special mention to the deadly medicaments, as a matter for conversation with a latent object; but he made the subject one upon which to give lessons, asserting that it was necessary for the purpose of properly understanding the extent and compass of the Italian language, that he should enter on the regions of science, and not confine his instructions to the fields of poetry and literature.

Had Clare Hilliard, upon arriving at the convic-

tion of this man's infernal nature at once removed herself from contact with him, had boldly and openly made known what he had more than hinted, all would have been well.

She did not do so.

She gradually became oppressed with a fear that this man, if offended by her, would destroy her sister, her father, her brothers by a slow and lingering torture ; that she should have the horror of daily seeing them waste away, without the power of saving them or being able to prove the cause of their ailment ; and therefore it became imperative upon her to conciliate him, that no injury might come to them.

While this course of instruction adopted by the Italian was in progress, Daisy was going through one of a different kind.

“Have I not listened attentively, Miss Frost, to all you have said to me?”

“Only with that attention, Miss Daisy, which I esteem due to the station in which your honored father has placed me, and with that propriety pertaining to your own position as a young lady of wealth.”

Daisy looked at the column of starch, with an expression that the ancient lady did not like ; hastened to check her by exclaiming: “Miss Daisy, exhaust

yourself, by no such performance. I do not wish for a reply. I do not expect one. I have given you my *dictum* as the representative of your father, and I only desire you to comply with my views, which you should feel are dictated only by a most elevated sense of decorous propriety, and a full comprehension of what is due to your place in society."

"I am sorry, Miss Frost, that your expectations and your desires do not coincide with my own," returned the young lady with firmness. "I believe, though but young, Miss Frost, that I am still old enough to be able to judge for myself in this matter. My impressions are convictions, so far as I am concerned, and I have acted upon them."

"Acted upon them? I do not understand you."

"I am sorry that the fault is not mine."

"Explain. To what do you allude? how have you acted?"

"By directing the steward to inform Signor Danato that I do not intend taking another lesson, and by letting that man see, by my demeanor, my sense of his insolent pretensions."

Here was rebellion to her; here was a direct intimation that her power was represented by that very expressive figure, 0; and she prepared at once to work herself up to that state of dignity, firmness, and determination, which should prove to Daisy that she was not to be held in this light considera-

tion—that she had been appointed to a responsible post, as the head of the household in the absence of Mr. Hilliard, and that her word must be obeyed without question.

Daisy saw what was coming; but, as the pouring out of the plagues on Egypt hardened Pharaoh's heart, so did the looming torrent of indignation gathering strength in Miss Frost's bosom, operate on the heart of Daisy. She determined once for all, to display her independence, and to maintain it.

“Are you not quite aware, Miss Daisy,” almost thundered Miss Frost, “if you were bent upon discontinuing the services of Signor Danato that his dismissal should come through me—that your proceeding to him was an indignity to which, upon a mere fancy, a ridiculous and erroneous notion—for Edesa, here, assures me that such is the case—he has no right to have been subjected.”

Daisy glanced haughtily at Edesa, as Miss Frost uttered this observation, and with a curl of her lip said, “I am not in the habit, Miss Frost, of submitting my impressions to the judgment of my maid. If that is another of your desires or expectations, I must beg of you to excuse my direct refusal to comply with it.”

“Daisy Hilliard!” ejaculated Miss Frost in a loud voice; “you intentionally misconceive me.”

"I have some reasons for my misconception, if such you consider it, and thus I prove it. Edesa!" she exclaimed, addressing the maid, in almost an imperious tone. "Be good enough to step forward here."

Edesa obeyed; her brows were slightly contracted, and her teeth were set.

"Some misunderstanding between you and my late maid, caused her to leave my service without an explanation. You informed me that she had left me; but, with a profession of great anxiety to spare me, you took the trouble of obtaining another within an hour after she was gone, informing me that you had done all this out of your great wish to show your love and respect for me, and with, in fact, the sanction of Miss Frost."

"Precisely! Edesa informed me of the quarrel between her and your maid; and that both could not remain in the house. You can scarcely desire to deprive me of my greatest comfort in this, my maid Edesa. I sanctioned the departure of your maid, and the appointment of your new one. Really, Daisy, what there can be objectionable in all this is out of my power to conceive."

"This, Miss Frost. I have not been consulted; my tastes, my wants have not been the subject of a consideration. I have for some years chosen my

own maid ; I am not going to resign that task now. Edesa, rang the bell for the new maid ! ”

Edesa obeyed ; but not with out a sullenness that contrasted strongly with her usual manner.

The bell was answered, and the girl made her appearance. She, too, was sleek in manner, but there was an expression in her eyes that was singularly antagonistic to marble purity.

“ There is in the housekeeper’s room, a young woman, with whom I have already had an interview,” exclaimed Daisy, “ bring her here ! ”

The new maid glanced at Edesa and retired. Presently she returned bringing with her a young, interesting-looking girl, who was plainly but neatly dressed.

Miss Frost had merged into the Hindoo idol again. But she was so overwhelmed with astonishment at the part adopted by Daisy, that her speech—almost her breath—was taken from her and she sat in a state of silent stupefaction.

Daisy asked the newcomer, “ What is your name ? ”

“ Sarah Hading. I am called Sally for short.”

“ You can perform all the duties of a maid ? ”

“ Yes, miss.”

“ Mrs. Jones, the housekeeper, gives you a most excellent character. Indeed what she has said in your favor has confirmed me in the intention I have

deliberately and with determination formed. Are you at liberty to enter now, from this moment, into my service?"

"A—a—Daisy!" exclaimed Miss Frost, forcing through her throat a passage for her astonishment.

Daisy quickly repeated her last sentence.

"Oh, yes!" replied Sally with earnestness.

"Then I engage you from this moment to be my maid." Turning to the new maid of Edesa's selection, she said: "You will apply at once to the steward, who will pay you your claim, and from this moment you are no longer in attendance upon me!"

"Ha—um—ha, Daisy! I positively must—a—have a voice in this matter," cried Miss Frost, gasping for breath.

"To confirm it if you will, Miss Frost," exclaimed Daisy, with great firmness. "Not otherwise. You are at liberty to make any representation you may think proper to my father; but in this instance, and until he peremptorily commands me to the contrary, I will take my own course."

"Daisy, your sister Clare, your senior by years, would not thus improperly set aside my authority," cried Miss Frost, with her eyebrows pressing on the confines of her wig.

"Clare is free to act as she pleases," retorted

Daisy: "She is yielding and easy in her nature, and is far from being sufficiently self dependent. She may, out of an amiable desire to maintain peace, continue to receive instructions from Signor Danato, whom she hates as deeply as I do."

"Hates? Daisy Hilliard," cried Miss Frost, with an electrified air. "Hate! A professor of Italian hated by a lady of position! Preposterous."

"Despises—loathes, whatever you will, Miss Frost, to express repugnance or abhorrence," cried Daisy, excitedly. "It is enough she entertains the same feelings toward him that I do, but, rather than make a sensation she continues to suffer annoyance herself. It may be well for her maid to be discharged, and be supplied with another by Edesa—to endure all this, out of the consideration for the feelings of persons of no consequence to her whatever. I cannot help that; it does not, will not, influence me. And now," to the girl Edesa employed, "leave the room and do what I have directed you."

"Well, miss, to be discharged at a moment's notice; it is not usual!" exclaimed the girl with a depreciating air.

"Miss Frost, I request you to desire your maid, Edesa, to conduct that woman from this apartment," exclaimed Daisy haughtily.

Edesa did not wait to be told by Miss Frost ; she raised her glittering eyes to Daisy and said, "It is enough for me, Miss Daisy, that you wish it. Allow me, dear lady to express my sorrow that my zeal should be considered impertinent interference. I will not so offend again !" she quitted the room.

Miss Frost rose up with solemn dignity, and, when balanced on her feet, and her head was elevated upon her scraggy neck as high as it could be made go, she said, "I have never, since the departure of your august father, been set so decidedly at defiance, Miss Daisy, as upon this occasion. I must communicate with him. Until then, permit me to inform you, I cannot receive you, nor meet you upon the same relations as heretofore. You will take your own way."

Turning slowly on her pivot, she filled her stately sails, and wended her way to her own apartment, to revive herself, after this scene with a little stimulant, with a different odor to rose-water.

As soon as she was gone Daisy turned to her new maid and said, "I like your looks very much. And I am sure that I can count on your faithful assistance ?"

"You may, miss," replied Sally, with energy.

"I am sure of it ; are you keen-sighted, quick to

observe and detect operations not meant for you to see ? ”

“ I believe I am so naturally. I am sure I could be if my mind was directed to such a task. ”

“ Then I will get you, with an assumption of an open, easy, amiable manner, to observe, with all the acuteness you possess, the movements of Miss Frost’s maid Edesa, and when you have the chance, of Signor Danato, and report what you may notice to me. No matter how trivial the circumstance, it may prove a link of the chain. You understand me ? ”

“ Oh, quite clearly. ”

“ That will do ; you will now commence your duties at once, especially that one of watching Edesa and Danato. ”

“ I will do my utmost to fulfill your wishes, ” said Sally, earnestly ; “ and I feel somewhat, that I shall succeed. ”

Daisy had been induced to take this unusual step, in one of her age, from a conviction that her sister Clare, was under some spell ; for she had observed that she was pale and thoughtful, sighed much, and often shuddered in her abstracted mood, and that these fits were all the stronger after Signor Danato had departed, on the completion of the Italian lesson.

CHAPTER XV.

RYLE HILLIARD had not forgotten his appointment with the woman Leonore. At the hour named he entered the cathedral by one of the principal doors, and as he stood listening to the rich swelling tones of the organ, a hand was laid upon his shoulder. He started, and turning, beheld a female, completely muffled in a veil.

She whispered in his ear, "Take the first street that leads to the river Panuco. At the water's edge you will see a boat in waiting. Give three low claps with your hand. The boatman will take you on board, and will land you upon a spot, near which stands a grove of trees. In that grove await further instructions."

She was about to glide away, but he caught her by the wrist.

"Stop!" he said in a low tone. "In New York, such a proposition might easily be entertained; in Mexico the case is different. You must name to me some further inducement for complying with your directions."

The woman hesitated a moment; then she whispered in his ear, "Eva Letton!"

She broke from his hold, and was quickly lost to view among the crowd assembled for services.

He paused, and felt in doubt as to the course he should pursue, but the name of Eva possessed far too great an influence over him, to remain indifferent to the adventure. He had no notion that he should see her, but there was a possibility that he would learn something respecting her; he resolved to go, come what might.

He quitted the cathedral, and passing into the street proceeded in the direction pointed out to him, until he reached the banks of the river.

He discerned a short distance in the stream a boat, with a man at the stern keeping it stationary with his long paddle and chanting lines from Tasso, apparently unconscious of aught but his own existence.

Ryle clapped his hands three times, and the man at once displayed the greatest activity of manner. The prow of the boat was directed toward the shore, and in another minute the boat was alongside.

"American?" ejaculated the boatman.

Ryle replied in the affirmative, stepped into the boat and seated himself.

Away sped the boat up the river. Ryle endeav-

ored to take note of the places he was passing, but he went so swiftly, and the darkness, from the absence of the moon, was such as to prevent his making out any place distinctly ; he resigned himself with patience to remain in a state of mystification, until something happened to give him a notion of the subject with which he was desired to perform this journey.

Suddenly he felt the keel of the boat grate on the edge of the shore, and he sprung out, leaping lightly on to the green grass which extended to the edge of the river.

“Do you wait for me?” he inquired of the boatman.

“No,” he replied. “I will return for you if those who employ me consider it necessary.”

The next moment the boat shot into the center of the river, and was urged back to where Ryle had embarked in it.

He watched it receding and, when it was no more to be distinguished, he turned to find the grove of trees which the woman had mentioned. He discovered it at a short distance, and he made toward it. He perceived that he was on private grounds of a handsome villa, which stood not far off, and which seemed to be closely shut up, as though it either needed a tenant, or that the tenant was in some other part of the world.

On gaining the grove of trees, he remained there for at least half an hour, without hearing aught but the rustle of the leaves of the trees. No sign of any one in the vicinity could he discover, no sound met his ear, to indicate the approach of a living thing. His patience began to be exhausted, when his quick ear detected the sound of a light foot-fall upon the grass; he sprung behind a tree determined to inspect the newcomer before he betrayed his presence there, and crouching down, watched with anxiety for the person, who, making direct for the spot, it was evident, was conscious of his being there.

To his surprise he saw a slender female; still he lay hidden, in order to see what movement she would make, and whether she was acquainted with his arrival.

She increased her speed as she drew near, until she entered the grove of trees, and then she paused. She gazed timidly round, and in a half-frightened voice, said: "Is there any one here awaiting my coming?"

He rose up, and advancing cautiously, said: "I am here. Was it you who desired to see me?"

The lady uttered a cry and placed her hand upon his arm.

"Merciful goodness," she exclaimed, "It is Ryle Hilliard!"

"Eva, Eva, my darling Eva! Can it be possible? Is this a dream? Do I again see you? Oh, what have I done to receive this gracious favor?"

He folded her passionately to his breast as he spoke, nor did she refuse that long and fervent kiss which he pressed upon her warm ruby lips. But when this ebullition of their fond devotion for each other had passed, they each instinctively shrunk from the other.

"Oh, Eva, do you not hate me?"

"Hate you, Ryle? Oh, no," she replied with earnestness.

"You forgive me then for my madness?"

"It is not for me to forgive, Ryle. The injury was not inflicted upon me, though I have suffered by it; I am not even acquainted with the circumstance connected with it, all that I heard was what one of your father's servants told your father at the cottage."

"To—to my father?"

"Yes—his object in coming to the cottage I know not; he came there soon after your departure. What followed I do not remember, nor recollect aught subsequently, until I found myself in a hotel in New York."

“And this man, who told it to my father—what passed at my interview with Jasper—what did he say?”

Eva repeated Wolf's story. Ryle could scarcely listen to her, for the violence of his indignation. He protested against its falsehood, and related to her what really did take place.

“Bad enough, I admit,” he said, “but still in no degree capable of such an infamous construction as that scoundrel put upon it, and quite devoid of the most fearful and murderous portion of the attack upon him. Jasper yet lives, and is in this city. I will seek him, and he will do me justice, at least, by acknowledging that I struck him in a moment of passion, heated to such violence by injurious charges, which to my face he made; and that with one word ceased further act or word between us.”

Eva bowed her head down as he said this.

“It must be!” she murmured with agony; “it must be—done!—and that I feel, great as the pain I suffer, without further delay; for to extend our interview can only make greater the anguish of parting, and to remain to violate the contract into which we both so solemnly entered. Oh, Ryle Hiliard, we must part! and let us at once understand that—forever.”

“No, Eva; rather would I perish here before you.

I love you, let the world say what it may. Let my father do what he can, I will make you my wife, if you will have me; and though I have consented and will submit to the probation upon which we agree, without seeking to infringe upon or violate its terms—still, at its expiration, I will claim your hand as mine—loving you, I am beyond all doubt assured you have the same love for me.

At this moment a woman rose up, as it were, out of the ground at their feet. She turned to Eva.

“Go,” she said. “You will meet Ryle Hilliard again.”

Eva bent her eyes upon Ryle with longing gaze, and slowly prepared to retire, but Ryle sprang to her side and took her hand.

“We cannot, must not part thus,” he cried.

The woman who had so suddenly appeared, however, waved her hand to Eva.

“Go,” she repeated again. “I have told you, you will meet again; and I repeat it. Let me give you this word of caution, that when you do meet, affect surprise if you feel it not. Go, Eva, and quickly. I would speak with Ryle.”

Ryle raised her small, soft, white hand to his lips and pressed it there passionately, and said: “We shall meet again, Eva.”

“If Heaven grant it, Ryle.”

When her retreating form was lost to sight, Leonore Letton turned to Ryle and said: "You are surprised at what I have done, you will be more surprised, when I tell you that not you alone, but your whole family are in the greatest danger; you are on the outer edge of a whirlpool, into which, unless extricated by the greatest skill, you will be drawn, revolving more swiftly to your doom as the circles grow smaller, and being ultimately engulfed without the possibility of redemption. It shall be my task to do all that lies in my power to save you from a fate so fearful as that which has been predetermined for you—a fate to which your fair sisters, equally with yourself, have been destined, and from which escape is just next to impossible. But there is time to avert it, and I will point out to you the way, though not now for you must go. But, remember, as you are faithful to Eva, so will I be with you."

"Who are you?—by what right do you assume to yourself the power of making a revelation so dreadful?"

"I am Leonore Letton."

"Leonore Letton! the wife of Letton? Eva's mother?"

"The same. I fear the approach of the boat you must depart this instant, in case your presence

should become known to those from whom it is imperative to keep it hidden. Can you make a friend of him with whom I saw you conversing, when I addressed you in the church?"

"Ay—a true and sincere friend."

"Secure him at once. You will need him, on a service of the greatest trust. Further, have you seen San Juan Alzemora?"

"I have."

"Beware of him! He is the most plausible, friendly seeming man living; but the most treacherous, designing, remorseless wretch this fair earth was ever cursed with. He is closely allied with Madam Vistula, who is your most implacable foe."

"Mine?"

"Yours! Never for an instant lose sight of that; or let her perceive by gesture, or glance, that you dream of it; but beware of her, of all, who would compass your destruction. Now go! the boat awaits you."

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE following day of the events of the last chapter, Leonore and Eva were seated in the sumptuous drawing-room of Madam Vistula's house; the madam being confined to her room by a slight indisposition, but had sent word to Eva that she would appear at the opera that night.

Leonore perceiving a carriage drawn up before the entrance, detected the person of the coming guest.

"Quick, my child!" she cried, "hasten to your room! And do not leave it on any consideration, until I come to bring you from it."

San Juan Alzemora was met at the door by Leonore Letton. Respectful in her manner, she seemed but taciturn and brief in her replies to the questions put to her by him; and as he detected, possessing some feeling beneath that impassable face of hers, which, be it what it might, was not favorable to him. He had often seen Leonore before, but it had been in years back, and the impression she then made upon him, or the estimate he had formed of her character, and the part she

had filled in the drama of the madam's life, was gone from his memory, after he had been ushered into the room, and heard that the madam had been very suddenly taken ill. And Leonore expressed her belief, with no unnecessary amplification, that she was not yet strong enough to render an interview with any one advisable.

"You will at least convey my message!" exclaimed San Juan Alzemora, pertinaciously.

Leonore obeyed; on entering the madam's room she found the lady still in bed. She no sooner learned that Alzemora was in the drawing-room beneath than she insisted upon being robed in a gorgeous morning attire, and then gave orders for his admission to her boudoir adjoining. It, like all the other apartments, was furnished with everything taste could devise, ingenuity exercise, and art accomplish.

When San Juan Alzemora entered the room, the madam rose up to receive him, but he hurried forward to prevent her, and having reseated her expressed his regret at her sudden illness, adding complimentary remarks upon her personal appearance, assuring her that her good looks were evidence of the near approach of restoration to health. Then suddenly he asked permission to speak with her alone as he had something very

important, which concerned his happiness to impart to her.

The madam sending Leonore from the room, asked Alzemora what she could do for him or his happiness.

“Madam Vistula, pardon me, but I love your Miss Letton.”

The madam was electrified at the words. He—the cold, deliberate, systematic man of the world—who had won hearts and broken them with a sneer, was himself now entangled.

“Yes madam, you have introduced me to this young lady. Ever since I beheld her fair lovely face, it has haunted me as the Madonna’s did Raphael. Can you, will you not intercede for me?”

“Never, San Juan Alzemora, as your wife, will I do aught to assist you; you may consider this interview at an end. I will be at the opera to-night. Bring Ryle Hilliard with you, and meet Eva and I there. I will arrange to meet you once more, before my first reception. You will please now leave me.”

“Madam, your wit is superior to my cunning! Farewell!” he slowly descended the stairs. He had forgotten Leonore; not she him. Not a single word that passed at that interview between him and the madam had escaped her watchful ear.

CHAPTER XVII.

"WELL my good fellows," said Rocco, "to business, for time presses with me. This, you say, is Jerry Menton?"

"Yes sir," said one of the party of three men, "that is he."

He was a tall, well-made man, erect, and with a certain respectability of manner in his movements, which the style of his dress could not altogether conceal.

Rocco regarded him attentively from head to foot, and a curl turned his upper lip. While he muttered to himself; "there must be great alteration here to effect any good."

"You say you name is Menton?"

"I am not quite sure as to that," replied the individual addressed with a cunning leer; "it may come to be proved to be Hilliard."

Rocco started, and looked into the wild, grimy face and bright eyes, almost glaring upon him with a fresh interest. "True," he said, "but you have passed for years under the name of Jerry Menton."

"Well," replied he, "it was the name under which

I was introduced to the government, and under which I served the term of an appointment under the present administration.

“Exactly, up at Sing-Sing! And you are the foster brother of Mr. Randle Hilliard?”

“Under any circumstances, I am that—that is, to him who at present holds that title.”

“Good!” cried Grasp with glee, rubbing the palms of his hands upon his knees. “You will save us a world of trouble, and we will be able to do well for you.”

“If you would desire to carry out my idea’s you must not drink any more liquor. Your part will be an important one: it will require ingenuity and skill of no common order; for we shall not only have to prove, by documents and the testimony of witnesses, that you are the legitimate son of Randle Hilliard’s father; that you show by your bearing, your manner and your appearance, that you have the true Hilliard blood in your veins.”

“And so I ha—” Jerry Menton checked himself as he uttered these words, and a burning flush spread itself over his features, hardened as he was in crime; for, had he uttered the whole of his intended assertion, he would have openly acknowledged his mother’s shame, and his own disgrace. The mind must indeed be callous to every feeling of pride, or

to the promptings of personal honor, that would make such an avowal unblushingly.

"I think," said Jerry Menton, correcting himself, "that you will not have any occasion to be uneasy about that. With a complete change of dress, you will find an entire change in my appearance. With money in my pocket, a manner as unlike that I now adopt, as may be conceived; with something approaching the resources of a gentleman, I can act the part, I think, pretty well."

"You shall have them, and we will prove this," said Rocco. "How long is it since you were down in the neighborhood of Hilliard Hall?"

"Many—many years," he returned.

"You have not, then, seen your mother for a long time?"

Jerry Menton looked at his finger nails, and moved his thumb uneasily over them.

"No I have not seen her for a number of years," he said in a low tone.

"I am glad of that," said Rocco. "So much the better. It will prevent her being too positive. Time may confuse her memory, and she may be able in her doubts and distraction, to materially aid us."

Jerry shook his head doubtfully, and said with a smile :

"That looks more probable than it will prove.

She is singularly clear-headed ; and in her memory, most retentive. We will have to adopt another method with her, to win her to our side. I think I know the way, but at present I shall reserve that point."

"Very well," returned Rocco. "You remember the incidents of your early life?"

"With a memory only too distinct."

It was arranged that Wolf should act as Jerry Menton's body servant, and after the two men had been transformed into respectable-looking individuals, and fully equipped with instructions, they, set out for the neighboring village near Hilliard Hall, arriving there at night, they put up at the only hotel the village boasted of. That night, after Jerry Menton had dined, he quitted the hotel, for, as he said, a stroll in the village.

The night was dark ; but he could find his path well, and passed down the straggling street—if such it could be called—looking at the houses as he went by them.

At length he stopped before one, and went up to the door and opened it. He entered, and saw an old woman, seated by a fire, with her hands crossed upon her knees, gazing into the red glare of the wood embers blazing on the hearth.

She was deep in thought, and did not hear the

opening of the door. Jerry cleared his voice, and then said, in a low voice: "Mrs. Menton!"

The old woman started, rose up, stood erect, and advanced toward him.

"I am she!" she exclaimed, in a clear voice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CARRIAGE drew up to the residence of the Honorable Judge Montemorris. Mr. Temple, followed by San Juan Alzemora got out of the vehicle. Mr. Temple desired an introduction to the newly arrived judge. Alzemora delivered himself of some polite hints to Mr. Temple, which were intended to convey to him an intimation that his company could be spared without a sigh. Mr. Temple appeared to be strangely dull in their reception.

After the first greetings had passed, and the first glass of wine discussed, criticised, and warmly praised, Mr. Temple said, with apparent carelessness, "I am fearful, Alzemora, that my English obtuseness stands somewhat in the way of my politeness. I believe, now, that I remember you to have said you wished to see the judge on some particular matter this evening. Let me ask pardon if my intrusion——"

"No intrusion, but an honor," interrupted the judge.

Mr. Temple smiled as if with a gratified air.

“As you please, judge. A thousand thanks, nevertheless, for the compliment. I will, however, change the word, and say, ‘visit.’ Let me hope my visit will not interfere with your purpose. The judge will not, I trust, consider me in the matter, but grant you half an hour or so while I, over a glass of wine, inquire of Mr. Van Scott some particulars of friends in New York, with whom I passed many pleasant hours in the earlier part of my career, but whom I have not seen nor corresponded with for some years.”

San Juan Alzemora for a moment was disconcerted—looked—yet the betrayal of his real feelings was but momentary, and with an easy, pleasing smile over his handsome features, the result of long study before a polished mirror of very truthful character—he said: “I must be candid with the judge. I did desire to see him to night; I had a matter on which I purposed speaking to him; but upon consideration, I will defer it till a more favorable opportunity.”

The judge rose and said, as he offered to lead the way to a private room: “I am willing, San Juan, to listen to all you have to say, or to serve you should you wish me to do so.”

San Juan considered for a moment, and then replied: “No, judge—I am equally favored; but not

now. I will reserve my object for the present; it will be better—by the way, have you met young Ryle Hilliard?"

"Young Ryle Hilliard," echoed the judge, raising his eyebrows; Hilliard; it is an English name!"

"Originally such, I have no doubt," said Mr. Temple; "but it is borne now by an American family of very high position and vast wealth."

Walter Van Scott twirled a piece of paper in his fingers, and appeared in no way interested in the turn the conversation was taking.

"Ah," exclaimed the judge, "some of these American families are fabulously wealthy with a free hand. In reply to your question, San Juan, I have not met the young gentleman. Is he here in Mexico?"

"He is. He is staying at the Yucatan House."

"I should like to have the pleasure of an introduction to him. I am rather partial to the society of men of his age and class. You can effect an introduction between us, San Juan, I know; and so put me under an obligation to you."

"Rather confer on me a pleasure, judge. It was my intention to have done so to-night: but in fact, my visit to you this evening was in a measure connected with an object I have in view with regard

to him, which can for the present, rest in silence."

"At any time you may appoint for an introduction or to communicate your wishes, I am at your command, San Juan," returned the judge with perfect ease.

"It must be soon, for he announces his intention of leaving Mexico shortly."

"To-morrow, if you will," said the judge.

"To-morrow be it," responded San Juan.

"By the by, San Juan, when I first took up your card, which you so greatly honored me by leaving on my arrival, it struck me that the name was familiar to my eyes or my ears. I have thought of this several times since I received it, but without forming any notion as to where I had seen or heard it till this moment.

"Indeed!" San Juan, looking at him with surprise; and then adding hastily, "I ought not to receive such communications with surprise. My name, I believe, is known in connection with some of the best families."

"Undoubtedly," returned the judge with the same easy manner; "but I am not now alluding to what I have heard. No; I heard your name in connection with an individual whom, some years since, I was able to be of service to. He was a Spaniard."

"A Spaniard?" repeated San Juan, unable to disguise the interest he felt in the subject which was about to be brought on the *tapis* and which he had a misgiving was not of a nature to add to his credit or his honor.

"Don Carlos," continued the judge, "do you remember the name?"

Alzemora was seized with a tremendous agitation. Thick drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead, and his teeth clinched as he sank back in his chair.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE EVENING on which Mr. Hilliard visited the opera, and saw Eva Letton seated by the side of the madam, and heard the remark of San Juan Alzemora, he at once experienced the full force of that ordeal for which he had prepared himself, and felt that the emotion which he was almost convulsed with was likely to betray him. Before he could reply to San Juan, his attention was suddenly called to the judge, who had slipped from his chair and fallen upon the floor in a fit.

His own emotions and agitation at once found a scapegoat in this occurrence, and he instantly summoned assistance. San Juan rendering, by means of his servants who were at hand, such aid as was necessary, the judge was placed in his carriage; and accompanied by Walter Van Scott was borne back to his rooms, when the attention of a medical man restored him to consciousness; but he at once determined on retiring to his private room, and left his pseudo secretary to wander and speculate as to what could have occasioned this sudden attack.

Ryle Hilliard, too, had intended, at the invitation of Bob Brent, to be present on this evening, found himself too weak in body and mind to bear the fatigue; he therefore remained away—a resolution to which Bob Brent also came when he learned his friend had decided on not going, and he preferred to stop at the hotel—sit with his friend, and while the evening away in chatting over the old scenes they had shared in together.

Thus whatever object San Juan and the madam might have had in bringing Eva and Ryle together—in introducing to her Honorable Judge Montemorris and Bob Brent—it was frustrated. The madam was greatly disappointed and vexed at the nonappearance of Honorable Judge Montemorris. His absence was accounted for, although it was the subject of considerable annoyance to her. On the morning following the madam's disappointments, at the opera, she received a communication by a special messenger; and within a week from that time her house was thrown open for her grand reception.

The rooms were decorated with all the skill which the high decorative ability of Italian artists and unlimited resources could achieve. The gardens and the walks were laid out in a style which reminded all who entered them of those eastern

wonders read of in tales of enchantment, but scarcely ever realized by human eye.

At the appointed hour, the house was thronged with the beauty and fashion of Mexico. When Eva appeared with the madam among the numerous guests—the ladies especially who exhibited beauty of a very striking kind—it was acknowledged that she bore the palm.

The Honorable Judge Montemorris and Mr. Van Scott were there among the early arrivals; the very earliest of which had been San Juan Alzemora and his special servant. This man would be useful to him in many respects on this occasion, he calculated; and ordered him to attend him to the reception. Not that such an arrangement was unusual, for Durango was more frequently with him than not; and would have been, this night, had it been an ordinary event, but he had a special purpose for his presence on this occasion.

He had been instructed by San Juan that the Honorable Judge Montemorris, would be at the reception; and with him his secretary. "You will accompany me in a similar capacity. Attire yourself accordingly. I will introduce you, as such to Mr. Van Scott, and see that you keep him; converse with him; watch him closely; make out all you can of him; and obtain from him as much as possible of

the private history of the judge; that, at least, I am specially desirous to obtain. I am also desirous of detaching him, as much as possible, from the judge to-night; as I imagine, though he does not permit it to appear, that he has a strong influence over the judge, and that I do not desire to see used, this evening at least."

Durango promised attention to his commands; and accordingly prepared himself for the part he had to play, on the arrival of the judge and his secretary, Mr. Van Scott.

San Juan, after the judge and his secretary had been received by the madam and Eva, greeted them. He took the opportunity of presenting Durango, his secretary and confidant, to Mr. Van Scott, and expressed his hope that they would make a pleasant acquaintance; drew the arm of the judge through his own and walked away instantly, leaving, in quite an unceremonious manner, Mr. Van Scott and Durango to make that intimacy of which he spoke.

A thought struck Mr. Van Scott. What might he not be able to obtain from this man in respect to designs schemed for his injury? Although he could scarcely expect to obtain possession of the actual plans, he might be able to obtain such a clue as would enable him to divert and frustrate them.

He seized the arm of Alzemora's instrument of villainy and moved with him toward a room, less thronged than the ball-room.

Ryle and Bob Brent arrived together, the madam received them, Eva standing by her side. They came late, and the madam—her principal guests being present—was able to mix among those who had already arrived. Her eyes glittered with unnatural brightness as she saw Ryle offer his arm to Eva, and watched them proceed to one of the conservatories.

"Oh, Eva!" he said when they had reached a spot out of hearing distance, "I am in all things in which you are identified, most painfully selfish. I so love you, it makes me unjust even to you."

"What do you mean, Ryle?"

"That I wish you were not here in this place and with that woman, Madam Vistula. You cannot think how it pains me."

"It is not my wish—with my will, Ryle, that I am here, it is more painful to me than it can be even to you. But what am I to do? how emancipate myself from the position in which I am placed? I came not here by choice—I cannot leave without knowing one place in this wide, wide world to receive me. And, Ryle, I will not return to the ball-room if you do not wish it. On the plea of illness,

I will retire to my room and no power shall force me to rejoin it."

"Eva! I cannot ask you to do so. Oh, when shall I have that right to protect you forever?"

"Never, murderer!" exclaimed a harsh voice.

A shadow fell upon them.

It was Jasper Letton.

Ryle staggered back astounded. Jasper glared upon him and said through his teeth:

"You have fastened upon me an injury I will never forgive. You felled me to the earth by a vile blow. Rather than my child should be your wife, I will see her dead first. Go! you will see her no more!" He hurried Eva away, while Ryle, electrified, stood transfixed to the spot.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MADAM, leaning upon the arm of Bob Brent, and closely attended by the Honorable Judge Montemorris, who appeared to be greatly fascinated and attracted, not only by her charms but by the graces of her manner.

Having completed a promenade to the extent of the rooms, they retraced their steps. As they did so, the judge observed, "I had anticipated the pleasure of having some conversation with Mr. Ryle Hilliard. I do not see him."

"Gone for a quiet chat, in one of the conservatories," remarked Bob, "with the prettiest girl in Mexico!"

"The daughters of Mexico, in my humble person, return you thanks, for the gallantry of your remark," exclaimed the madam, with a polite sneer.

"Permit me to correct my observation, madam," returned Bob, "by saying the prettiest New York girl in Mexico."

"I subscribe to your opinion, sir," she said, "and

in return will say that I think Eva Letton has the sweetest face I ever saw."

"Come from some proud family, I presume?" said the judge, looking steadfastly at the madam, who replied:

"No, but she is descended from an old and wealthy family residing somewhere in New York."

"Oh! near the Hilliard estate I am sure," cried Bob.

"The Hilliards are of an old family," remarked the judge.

"Yes, they can date back to generations of wealthy and proud ancestors."

"Madam, have you ever seen Mr. Randle Hilliard, Ryle's father?" asked Bob.

"I—no—that is—yes, in years past," she returned, with some slight embarrassment.

"Ah!" returned Bob; "very proud, haughty gentleman, and supports his order with most patrician bearing."

Ryle Hilliard had not recovered himself from the astonishment in which the sudden, unexpected presence of Letton, during his interview with Eva had plunged him, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

He turned and saw Leonore Letton.

"Ryle," she said, "you seem converted into a

statue! but take my advice, do not return to the ball-room, but hasten to your hotel; avoid as much as possible being abroad until you hear from or see me. Farewell!"

"Farewell!" he responded. "I will follow your counsel."

She disappeared as she spoke, and he followed the advice he had received, returned to his hotel, leaving Bob to think what he might at his sudden disappearance.

Leonore had followed Eva to her room, where her father had commanded her to go, after he had given her instructions to be ready in a few days to return to New York with him.

"Oh mother, mother!" exclaimed Eva as Leonore entered, "when will this strange, this unreal life that we are living end? why are you and my father enemies to each other? and why cannot we leave Mexico and return to our cottage, where I was so happy? Do, oh do let us go away from here," pleaded Eva.

"All in good time my child, we will return to New York, and some day I will tell you all you want to know, but, not now; the time has not come yet for you to know many secrets which are best for you not to know just at present." It was with a weary sigh that Eva closed her eyes in sleep that night.

CHAPTER XXI.

JERRY MENTON regarded with emotion the tall, erect, pale-faced, but bright-eyed woman, who stood before him when he called her up from her place by the fire.

It seemed to him that not much change had passed over her features since he had parted with her, in grief and shame, many long years past.

He had the impulse to rush into her arms, but her cold manner repelled him, and he remained silent, permitting her clear, bright eyes to peruse his features.

"Do you know me?" at length he said.

"It is seldom, Jerry Menton, the mother forgets her offspring!" she said in cold tones.

"Yet, you welcome me not."

"Welcome you Jerry!" she returned with bitterness. "Welcome you! for what should I welcome you here again?"

"Am I not your son?"

"Indeed you are to my misery."

"Mother!"

"Is that fact new to you, Jerry Menton?"

He dropped his head and clinched his hand.

"You were ever doing or contriving wrong," continued the woman. "Every step in age became an onward movement to crime, until at last you paid the penalty awarded by the law. I have borne," she said, "the shame for your misdeeds upon me."

"Well, you need not bear the shame any longer."

"How can you release me from it?"

"As easy as that I shall relieve myself of that name which is not mine, and by assuming that which is rightfully mine."

"Yours?"

"Yes, that of Hilliard—I am the rightful heir, and a Hilliard."

"How can you prove it?"

"That you are not my mother."

Mrs. Menton recoiled a step or two, and gasped for breath. Then recovering herself she said, "I do not understand you."

"Do you want me to tell you?"

"Proceed; I listen."

"The one who claims to be the rightful heir, and myself are about the same age, you nursed both in our infancy?"

"I did."

"You frequently observed the extraordinary resemblance we bore to each other?"

"True."

"Either might easily be mistaken for the other."

"Not by the keen eyes of a mother."

"Yes, they could, and for the interest of your own child you changed the babies, the present Mr. Hilliard is your son—I am not! I disclaim you—I deny you—I renounce the affinity, and shall at once proceed to lay claim to what is mine!"

"Are you mad, Jerry?"

"Not mad, but just recovering to a proper sense of my true position. I ought to have seen that you were not my mother."

"You know yourself to be what you are—and have been! Some one has moved you to take this step for some particular purpose—the gratification of some vile malice. It is a vain attempt."

"Indeed! You are likely to find yourself to be mistaken."

"It shall not succeed!"

"Shall not?"

"No."

"Who can or will—save Randle Hilliard—attempt to prevent it?"

"I will—for I can prove Randle Hilliard to be the rightful heir, and not you, for you are *my son*, to my deep sorrow."

“Will your word be taken, think you?”

“It does not rest upon my word.”

“No?”

“I have a proof which places Randle Hilliard’s right beyond a doubt.”

“Does he know it?”

“No.”

“Who does?”

“I have told you—I have.”

“You have the power of producing that proof at any time.”

“I have.”

“And would do so to support his possessions?”

“Against any who would try to take away from him what rightfully belonged to him.”

“And I your son?”

“I have said it, even against you.”

CHAPTER XXII.

It would have been considered an extremely suspicious proof of sound sleep, had any one seen Clare Hilliard's maid start up from her easy chair, on seeing her young lady sink to the floor, in a fainting fit, after her perusal of a note written by Signor Danato. She saw that Clare was quite senseless; and then, having secured hastily the note which had created such an effect upon her young lady, she hurried to the housekeeper's room, and requested her attendance and assistance, that her young lady was ill.

Clare, like her brother Ryle, sank beneath this mental strain, and delirium followed the cessation of her fainting fits. She raved incoherently of her sister and her brothers—her father—of Danato—and of poison. A violent fever accompanied the delirium; and it was some weeks before she was pronounced out of danger.

Daisy took the earliest opportunity of summoning the steward, and on his presenting himself, she said, "I direct you to discharge absolutely and unequiv-

ocally Signor Sabina Danato. You will pay the man his demand, and not acquaint him by whose direction you discharge him. You will be decided and prompt in the transaction, and not permit it to occupy more than two or three minutes."

The steward promised obedience, and she retired to write a letter to Ryle, urging him to return, giving him a long account of what had taken place—the strange mystery which was hanging over them—the absence of their father—the painful illness of Clare, and ending again by an earnest appeal to him to come home.

On the following morning the sudden illness of Clare, Signor Danato presented himself at the mansion, to give the usual lesson, the footman admitted him, and he was about to ascend the stairs with his usual gliding step, when his progress was stopped.

"Come with me," said the footman, leading the way to the steward's room, "you are wanted by the steward."

Signor Danato grew a paler yellow than usual; cold drops of perspiration trickled down his back, and the scoundrel slunk after the footman, uncertain whether he should on his return be flung into the street.

"I am instructed," said the steward, when Danato stood before him, "by Miss Daisy Hilliard, to tell

you that your visits, professionally and otherwise, cease from to-day. I will pay you to this day inclusive, and you are not expected to call here on any pretense, until you are sent for. You will please remember that."

"Sir! I am engaged to attend professionally Miss Clare Hilliard by Miss Frost!" remonstrated Danato. "I should receive my dismissal from her."

The steward now recollected Miss Daisy's instructions to him, to be speedy in his interview with Danato, and he said hastily, "Well, sir, it is impossible for you, under any circumstances to see Miss Clare. She was taken suddenly ill last night, on retiring to her room."

"Ill? but you said it was Miss Daisy's orders that I am thus abruptly dismissed, was it not?"

"By what right, sir, do you ask any such impertinent question?" inquired the steward acting now upon his instructions.

"You said——"

"I said nothing, sir, but that your services were no longer required here!"

"Permit me——"

"To ask nothing! I never submit, Mr. Italian Professor, to be questioned. You have your money. Go! good morning!"

"But I distinctly——"

"Will you go, sir?" roared the steward. He jumped up, and seized Danato by the arm, hurried him along the passage, and then cried loudly to the footman, "The door!"

Danato darted through the doorway, almost blind with passion at the indignity he had been made to suffer.

He made his way, yet trembling with fury, to the dwelling of Rocco, where he was admitted to an interview.

"I am discharged from my professional labors at Hilliard mansion, and Miss Clare is dangerously ill."

There was a knock at the room door, and Rocco, raising his finger to Danato, said, in a low tone:

"Come in!"

"Only me," responded an equally bland voice; and Lawyer Grasp glided into the room.

At a sign from Rocco, Danato retired, from the room and house, and made his way to another part of the city.

Cunning as he was, he was quite unconcious that his visits to Hilliard mansion had been carefully noted down in a small pocket memorandum book, by a quiet, and bright-eyed man; that he had been followed to Rocco's and thence to the house where

he now was, and where every action would be known to this man who carefully made memorandums of anything at all worthy of note in that queer-looking note-book of his.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RYLE could not fail to be interested in the account Bob Brent gave him of what transpired at the ball, the night previous; Bob called at an early hour that morning to see what had taken Ryle away from the scene of gayety so unceremoniously. Ryle could not reveal all that had happened; he only said that Eva was taken ill and had retired to her room, and he had no desire for dancing so made his way to his hotel.

The letters arrived just then; Ryle recognized the writing on one as that of his sister Daisy's. He tore it open and read it attentively to the last. The letter wound up by her signing herself his unhappy sister Daisy; and concluded with the words, "Dear, dear brother, come home in haste for we are in great distress." He was astounded. "What can it all mean?" he ejaculated. He was aroused from his emotions of wonder by exclamations from his friend Bob, who cried:

"My vacation is up! Here's a letter from my father whose commands I must obey, I must

therefore pack up my traps, and away to New York to-morrow."

Ryle considered whether he should not do the same, too. He was about to suggest such a determination when the Honorable Judge Montemorris was announced.

After a few words, which Bob had shaped into a leave-taking, the judge said, "One word, and no reply. Eva Letton is now on her way to New York; in charge of her so-called mother, I have insisted upon her leaving Mexico. Keep this to yourself. Act as you please, but be faithful to me, and do not reveal from whom you obtained the information."

He pressed Ryle's hand and hurried away. The following morning Ryle Hilliard and Bob Brent were on their way to New York.

The first intimation received by Daisy that her letter to her brother addressed to Mexico, had safely reached its destination, was given in a breathless announcement made to her by Sally, that Mr. Ryle had not only come back to New York, but was at that moment entering the mansion with a friend.

Daisy uttered a scream of delight which was echoed by Ryle who rushed into the room. Daisy welcomed her brother warmly to his home; she touched lightly upon all that had transpired, because

she feared to excite her brother's anger, so that, impetuous as he was by nature, he might not hastily commit himself.

Mr. Randle Hilliard soon followed upon the heels of Ryle to New York. And it appeared to be understood between the father and the son, that no reference should be made to the past. Neither alluded to it; and their intercourse seemed to be upon a more frank and friendly term. Each knew the other had been in Mexico; but while the father was pretty well acquainted with his son's movements, Ryle had not the slightest idea that he had seen his father performing the part of Mr. Van Scott.

Mr. Randle Hilliard was well aware that the madam, aided by San Juan Alzemora would not give up her designs upon his happiness, and he lost no opportunity in preparing himself for the encounter which he knew he should face; and thus he was almost constantly occupied in fortifying himself against an attack, certain to be made, but of the shape it would assume he was entirely ignorant.

The steward one morning entered Mr. Hilliard's library, with the greatest possible astonishment printed upon his face.

"What is the matter, Martin?" inquired Mr. Hilliard, instantly seeing that something had occurred.

"The most extraordinary thing in the world, sir," replied the steward. "John Alberts, one of your tenants, at Hilliard estate, has just come from there, and he has handed me the most remarkable paper."

"What is its purport?" asked Mr. Hilliard calmly.

"Nothing more nor less than a notice from a lawyer to him, not in the future to pay to you the rent for the cottage and the land he occupies," responded Martin.

"Upon what grounds?"

"That there is a person—an individual who has come forward to claim your estates on the plea that *he* is the true heir, and that you usurp the title and the property, having no legal claim to it."

Mr. Hilliard upon hearing this strange statement rose up and clinched his hands. By an effort he remained calm, and reseated himself.

"Have you the document, Martin?" he inquired.

"I have sir; but in my hurry to acquaint you with this most ridiculous affair I have left it in my room."

"Martin, it is by no means a ridiculous affair," exclaimed Mr. Hilliard gravely. "Should this man be supported by money, I may find it a difficult matter

—such is the anomalous state of our laws—to prove that I am really myself, the lawful son of my father, and true heir of that which, by every law of right and fact, is incontestably mine. Bring me that document.”

As soon as Martin had gone, Mr. Hilliard leaped to his feet, and paced the room.

“So,” he soliloquized; “the new attack is to take this shape, is it? it is cunningly designed. I was not prepared for this. I must summon Gaston to my assistance. I must meet art with art, cunning with cunning! Who can be the person they will set up as claimant? Some low wretch, doubtless, in order to more deeply wound me. If they do, they will in that defeat themselves; for low persons always have antecedents not of a very favorable character, and their origin can generally be traced and fixed. But I must not underrate the ability with which they will not only plan but execute their purpose. What is done, will be most craftily done; and, really, will be only likely to be overthrown by equal or superior craft. I am at least, thankful that the machinations of this most malevolent fiend in human shape has taken, at length, a distinctive form.”

The footsteps of the steward approaching, induced him to resume his seat; and he anxiously stretched

out his hand for the paper Martin held. He took it and read it hastily down.

“This, indeed, is serious; my foster-brother is unearthed, and he is to be the implement used to destroy me!”

The document he held in his hand was a legal notice, properly drawn up, calling upon John Alberts, as tenant of the cottage and grounds, to no longer pay his rent to Randle Hilliard, of Hilliard Hall, but to retain the same in his hands until the law has decided between a claimant to the estate and the one now in possession which is the rightful heir to the vast property. It was signed Ralph Grasp, counselor to the heir-at-law.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN once the game—Jerry Menton's claim to the Hilliard estates—fairly started, there was no pause in the proceedings. The mode adopted under the inspiration of that exceedingly acute and honest lawyer, Grasp, may be better understood by the observation of Mr. Hilliard's lawyer, a gentleman of high position in his profession, and a man of elevated principles, great legal acquirements, and a highly cultivated intellect; quite equal to any generous or noble action—immeasurably removed above anything contemptible or mean.

"This fellow," said Lawyer Lange to Mr. Hilliard upon a recent interview, "is determined to proceed by the most annoying course he can adopt. It is usual to select a portion of the estate, and commence an action for its recovery. The verdict given in that governs all the rest; but here we have several notices of action—some on quite different issue—and the ejectments are flying about right and left. I have just been informed that money is

being liberally dispensed among some of the worst of the inhabitants around Hilliard Hall, in order to get up a demonstration against you. Already have some of your best and most devoted tenants had their hay ricks fired. It is only this morning that a letter has reached me from a person whom I have placed down there to keep me acquainted with what is going on, and yesterday evening some three or four corn ricks belonging to John Alberts were destroyed by incendiaries."

"I am hardly surprised to hear this," replied Mr. Hilliard. "It is all a portion of one plan to destroy me. I know the source, and I do not fear but that I shall be ultimately able to crush the directing hand in these infamous movements against me. The legal part of this unhappy affair I must leave to you, Mr. Lange. Spare no cost; lavish outlay must be met by a corresponding expenditure."

"Fear not," replied Lawyer Lange. "Everything shall be done that the case demands. It is well that I am aware of the character of the person, Grasp, who is conducting the case for the plaintiff. He is one of the ferrets of the law—a law trickster who has made it his study to master every legal quibble and every low, dirty, contemptible advantage which the indefinable character of many of our statutes gives to men of his stamp. But

forewarned of the man's chicanery, I have arranged the case in such a manner, and placed the conduct of its various stages in such hands, that not a move can he contemplate but one shall be prepared for and anticipated."

After this interview, Mr. Hilliard, returned to his library and found upon the table, cards of invitation for himself, Ryle, Clare and Daisy, for a princely entertainment to be given by the Whitneys at their mansion in Washington.

Ryle at this time, returned from a most indefatigable search after Eva. He resolved to prosecute his inquiry quietly but diligently, and had sanguine hopes that he should prove successful. He quite saw the necessity of not appearing to be engaged in the prosecution of such an inquiry, and readily accepted the invitation to join his sisters and father.

On the night of the entertainment, the magnificent mansion of the Whitneys was brilliantly lighted up, and the drawing-rooms were filled with some of the most distinguished visitors in the land, as well as several foreign diplomatists.

Soon after they had arrived at the mansion, Bob Brent made his way to Clare and Daisy. With him was a most elegantly attired foreigner; after Bob had greeted the young ladies, he said;

“Permit me, Miss Clare and Miss Daisy Hilliard, the honor of introducing to you Mr. San Juan Alzemora, who has just arrived in Washington from Mexico.”

After the ceremony of introduction was gone through, Daisy said mentally: “I don’t like him.”

Juan Alzemora appeared much struck with the beauty of the young ladies, but especially Daisy; he started when he gazed at her face. “The living image of her mother!” he murmured; “even as though she had been lifted out of the past and placed before me.”

When Ryle came up, his surprise at seeing Alzemora was plainly apparent.

Alzemora would have addressed him familiarly; but Ryle received his attentions coldly, replied to his remarks, with a *hauteur* chilling, and eventually requested his sisters to accompany him in a promenade.

As they walked on, attended by Bob Brent, who was not to be shaken from Daisy, and followed by the eyes of Alzemora, they encountered their father, and stood to speak with him.

They were joined by Mr. Whitney, who, in coming up said:

“Mr. Hilliard, will you permit me to introduce you to one of the finest ladies in the room. I am not

sure you have not met before, but I am convinced you will at least meet now."

Mr. Hilliard, with a bow, assented, and Mr. Whitney seized his arm, and bore him off to another part of the immense room, working his way through the throng until he had reached a corner, surrounded by a blaze of wealth and fashion. A lady was seated there, the observed of all observers, addressed by the most brilliant and distinguished men there. An opening was made for Mr. Whitney, who, leading up Mr. Hilliard said :

"Allow me to have the happiness to introduce Mr. Hilliard to Madam Vistula—Madam Vistula, Mr. Hilliard."

The madam rose; her face became as white as marble; but she bowed to his salutation with the most studied and elegant politeness.

San Juan Alzemora stood at the madam's side.

They were face to face now in their own proper characters.

CHAPTER XXV.

MUCH as Jerry Menton desired another interview with his mother, it was with something like pleasure he learned she had quitted the neighborhood of Hilliard Hall. For the successful prosecution of his design upon the estates of Randle Hilliard, it was needful that he should either have so important an authority as his mother, the nurse of his foster-brother, or that she should be kept out of the way.

Wolf could not manage to keep sober himself. Drink he would, and when in his cups would quarrel with the man to whom he had sworn eternal friendship. Eventually he got a tremendous mauling from a burly fellow, and Jerry sent him to New York. Jerry then went to see Mrs. Alberts, and from her ascertained that her husband had seen Leonore Letton in New York, and discovered where she resided. He immediately proceeded to New York in search of her.

It is night!

Dark, somber night!—night in New York—night

in one of its shabbiest, dirtiest streets—that is, of those who aspire to any pretense of gentility!—night in an east-side street, and it was dark and silent!

Possessing such advantages for secrecy, it would scarcely seem surprising that Leonore Letton should have selected it as the residence for herself and Eva, until she could have some clear notion of the direction events were likely to take; but, so far as she was concerned, it was not a matter of selection.

On arriving in New York, Leonore hired a cab, which she directed first to convey her and Eva to the Hilliard mansion on Fifth avenue, and on reaching there, when the cab stopped, they got out and discharged it.

Leonore pointed out to Eva the mansion, and told her to whom it belonged—reminded her that he who had avowed for her the most devout love, was next heir to that and all other property pertaining to the Hilliard estates, and that if he kept his word and married her, she would dwell in as proud a home as that.

A carriage dashed up to the door, and a handsome young lady, very proud and haughty, alighted, and passed into the house.

It was Daisy Hilliard. The door closed, and the carriage swept by.

"It is easy to see that that young lady is one of Ryle Hilliard's sisters," exclaimed Leonore.

"I knew her again," murmured Eva. "I have seen her with her sister in Hilliard Park.

"A loving and tender sister she is likely to make you, Eva," observed Leonore with bitterness.

Eva shrunk back with a shudder.

Leonore cast her eyes to the right and left; "I will know the house again," she said, and drew Eva away.

A cab drew up to the sidewalk and Leonore asked the man on the seat if he could tell her of a quiet street and retired neighborhood where she and her daughter could live peaceably. The man replied instantly in the affirmative, and at once drove them to his sister's house in the shabby, dirty street on the east side of the city.

Here they resided for some time, having, as it seemed, completely and effectually destroyed all clue to their place of abode. Leonore, at times, paid a visit to the neighborhood of Hilliard mansion, to ascertain, as near as possible, what was passing, and shaped her plans accordingly.

She had succeeded in learning of the return of Ryle Hilliard and his father to New York, information she did not at present think it advisable to bestow on Eva, who was dull, without being yet further

unsettled by such news. It was during the return of one of these visits that the man Alberts, had seen her and recognized her, but she, as he said, had not seen him to remember him; and it was very shortly after this unfortunate encounter, that she was one evening seated with Eva, who was very sad, when the door suddenly opened, and a gentleman of somewhat commanding exterior entered.

Leonore rose to her feet and without waiting to be addressed said:

“You have mistaken this room, sir!”

“No,” said the stranger in a low deep voice, as he concealed nearly the whole of his face with his handkerchief.

He closed the door behind him, and Leonore at once advanced to meet him.

“I tell you, sir,” she cried in an authoritative tone, “that you have mistaken the place or persons you desire to visit.”

“No,” said the man, “for you are Leonore Letton and there sits Eva Letton.”

Leonore was astonished. She did not recognize the stranger. “Who, may I ask, does us the honor of so abruptly breaking in upon our privacy?” demanded she.

“I am Jerry Hilliard, formerly known as Jerry Menton, rightful heir to Hilliard Hall and estates.

Ah, you know me now, Leonore Letton; it is not a very easy task to forget one who grew up from childhood under the same roof. You can be of great service to me in helping me to claim my rights."

"What madness is this, Jerry Menton? for indeed I do know you now."

"Yes, who should know the truth—the truth, so well as you Leonore Letton? Do you know who was my father? did you never have a suspicion that a Hilliard paid for my education."

Leonore sprang to her feet. He caught her by the arm.

"Listen!" he cried. "The late Mr. Hilliard was the father of myself, and he who now holds possession of the Hilliard estates. He was the son of Leonore Menton, *she* changed the children in our infancy. I can prove it by the voice of one who alone has the power of doing it; and I must win, and become, that to which I am truly entitled! The wandering outcast shall become the proud man of wealth! Will you now help me to obtain what you can prove belongs to me?"

Leonore was bewildered. She remembered all the events, and rapidly reviewed them.

Certainly, they seemed to tell in favor of Jerry's claim. Leonore Menton, Leonore Letton's adopted

mother's conduct to Jerry, if he were her son, was unnatural, and all the probabilities were in favor of his being the rightful heir.

Jerry waited for her answer, but Leonore's surprise had been too great; she must think, and she could only prevail upon Jerry leaving her with the promise that she would in a few days see him again and give him an answer.

When Jerry Menton parted from her she sat alone in the room, Eva having withdrawn on the entrance of Jerry. The past was now before Leonore, with almost terrible freshness; this sudden, unexpected, and extraordinary incident, though it had placed her whole being in a tumult, had not deadened her faculties to what might happen.

First there was Eva. She clasped her hands together and sighed deeply; and as she traced out once more the past and foreshadowed the future, tears—burning, painful tears—again filled her eyes, and she sobbed bitterly. And while she wept, she became conscious that an arm gently stole about her neck, and a low sweet voice whispered in her ear, “Mother! why do you weep? Did that stranger bring to you sad news?”

Leonore threw her arms about Eva's neck and kissed her with great tenderness; then she put her from her and motioned her to a seat. Eva looked

with surprise and interest upon the flushed and excited features of her who generally bore an aspect so cold and still.

Making an effort to speak clearly and to control her emotions, Leonore said abruptly:

“Eva, I am not your mother.”

There was a pause, and Leonore went on: “I see you are not surprised to hear this, and I have seen from the first that you doubted the relationship.”

Eva gazed upon her with eager eyes, but did not by either word or motion seek to offer contradiction to what she stated.

“Yes,” said Leonore thoughtfully. “I alone can prove that fact, and the day may come soon when it will be necessary to do so.”

“And your husband—whom I so long was told to believe was my father?”

“Is not your father,” returned Leonore.

“Thank heaven!” exclaimed Eva.

“Yet he was always kind to you, Eva; why should you be thankful that he is not?”

“Not because of any conduct he has evinced to me, not that I would hope to find a parent in one of a higher station, or of a nature more affectionate; but because—because—it is a relief to know that the one I loved raised his hand in anger not against my father.”

“Letton never for an instant credited that you were his child; but it is needless to enter into this part of my history or yours.”

“But who were my parents?”

“It will avail you little now to know. Both your parents died while you were a little more than an infant; they were humble, but honest and worthy. I married Letton at the wish, and by the counsel of the man I loved. I committed the error under the influence of an impression, that he whom I loved, was desirous of releasing his mother, Leonore Menton, from the burden of partly keeping me, and that he was so selfish as to have no desire to lend any assistance, in fact, wished to get rid of me. I knew, when too late, that this was an error on my part, and I have been punished for it. I married Letton and—and—I become a mother.”

She burst into a paroxysm of tears.

“After the birth of the child—a girl—I became so unhappy and ill. My doctor advised me to go to a small village up the Hudson, for change of air, and to find some one to take charge of my child which I was too weak to nourish. I found a place to stop at; it was with your father and mother, who were young and had been married scarcely a year. You were their only child and the same age as mine. After staying with them some time, I re-

turned to Letton, leaving my child under the charge of your mother—for it was sickly and required careful nursing to bring it around. Three years passed on, and I occasionally went to see my child. On my return home from one of these visits, I found Madam Vistula and San Juan Alzémora in close conversation with Letton. Madam Vistula offered Letton a big reward to acquaint her, from time to time, with what transpired at Hilliard Hall.

“I learned then, the cause of the madam’s bitter hatred toward Randle Hilliard. It was when Randle Hilliard, in his youth met the madam, that she fell desperately in love with him; so sure was the madam that the love she bore him was reciprocated, that when Clare Day stood the proud bride of Randle Hilliard at the altar, she vowed she would make it her life’s work to bring Randle Hilliard, and all belonging to him, as low down as the dirt under her feet. So far she has accomplished part of her vow, she has through her infamous plotting separated his wife from him, and she has now got agents employed to ruin his daughters and to sweep his estates and wealth from him.

“From what I learned in Mexico, the madam did not use her whole name; she should be known as Madam Vistula Morelia; she married a man by the

name of Urias Morelia for his great wealth. His body was found in the waters of the Panuco.

“But I have wandered from what most interests you. I went to make another visit to your mother, I found that your father had just died of a low fever; that my child was just sinking under it, and that your mother was already seized with it. Two days sufficed to close the eyes of my unhappy offspring and of your mother. I followed them to the grave, and you were left alone in the wide, wide world. Grief, trial, affliction had not subdued a vengeful spirit within me. I hated Letton with an intensity no words can describe, for he gave me no peace. He never had even a word commonly civil to address me with—an epithet too harsh, too degrading, or too brutal to apply to me. I knew he would hail with malignant satisfaction and joy the death of my child, but I determined that he should not have that satisfaction. I dressed you in the clothes of my dead child, and brought you to Letton cottage. He yelled, swore at you—I think would have killed you but that I stood between him and his deadly wrath; and when that fearful hurricane of passion was gone, he came to look upon you as a creature whose presence beneath his roof was inevitable, and I believe he learned to love you, for I left him then and entered the services of Madam Vistula, and also

while in Mexico I learned that Ryle's mother wears the habit of the Sisters of Charity, living a holy life, by doing acts of charity.

"The letter I received yesterday was from her, saying she stood by Letton until he breathed his last. He died from a fever, forgiving all his enemies."

Eva twined her arms around Leonore's neck and said. "How can I thank you sufficiently for this revelation? How can I be grateful enough to you for having proved the friend which in the hour of death and desolation——"

"By never speaking to me of it," returned Leonore, tears rolling down her cheeks, "by not thinking me deserving of the esteem of innocence, by yet believing that I love you, and will never fail to prove your friend, so long as the power to be so is permitted to me."

"And shall we, dear, dear Leonore, be able to save Ryle from the wicked hatred of Madam Vistula Morelia?"

"We can try, Eva. Oh! Eva, Eva, would that you were my child! Oh! inflexible heaven, this is my punishment of my sin."

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONVENT OF THE S. H.

MR. RYLE HILLIARD.—DEAR SIR:—A singularly embarrassing and yet agreeable circumstance has occurred, in which it is imperative you should pay a visit to the convent. It relates to one whom you have long looked upon as dead. Bring your sisters Clare and Daisy with you, for they are as deeply interested in this event as yourself. Fail not to come immediately on receipt of this.

Yours obediently,

Mother M——.

Twice over did Ryle read this with the greatest emotion. A mother they had long since mourned as dead. Could it be her? His heart beat almost to suffocation. He hastened to his sisters and showed them the letter. With the greatest possible avidity the girls perused its contents, and then bursting into tears, they exclaimed:

“Oh, Ryle, it is our mother; I have long believed there has been something respecting her more than we have been permitted to know,” said Daisy.

“Though dead to us she has been yet living in this world. Hurry, girls, and let us go to her.”

Clare and Daisy were not long preparing themselves

for the street. And as they hurried along they were but a short time in reaching the convent. They were shown into one of the reception rooms; they had not long to wait, and kept in subjection the great excitement they were all laboring under.

Ryle was speaking to his sisters when he heard a sweet low voice exclaim in a tone which admits of no description:

“Ryle, my son!”

He turned quickly, and before him stood the Sister of Charity whom he had met in the church in Mexico.

Ryle for a moment stood motionless. He recognized the pale, ascetic, and still lovely features of Sister Madeline.

The Sister of Charity stood silently, with flushed cheeks, awaiting the movements their impulses would suggest; in breathless expectancy, hoping nature would quicken their instincts, and leaving her nothing to say, compel her children to pronounce that name, dearer to her than any title wealth or ancestry could bestow. Not alone was she anxious to learn whether they would recognize her in her maternal relation to them, but she was deeply concerned to ascertain if, having faith in the integrity of her esoteric principles, they would acknowledge her as alone she desired they should;

as one from whom they had, by untoward circumstances been parted for years, but who, after departure, during her absence and on her return, was pure and stainless, worthy to be caught to their hearts, without a suggestion rising up to mantle their cheeks with a blush.

Ryle turned his gaze mechanically upon his sisters. He saw the intense expression ; their clasped hands and motionless figures. What did all this combination of human emotion, though locked in such marble stillness convey, if it meant not what the voice of nature shouted in their ears ?

“Oh, my mother—my dear, dear mother !” exclaimed Ryle, falling upon his knees before her.

“My boy—my daughters ! Oh, my children, that I should ever have fled from you !” sobbed Mrs. Hilliard, for it was she who stood before her children as the Sister of Charity.

Ryle caught her in his arms—he pressed her to his heart—and rose up to place her gently in a chair, for he knew she had fainted.

The sisters with tears in their eyes hurried to her aid, and applying restoratives, restored her to the happiness of seeing herself surrounded by those whom she most dearly loved on earth. The girls kneeling at her side ; her son with his cheek to hers bending fondly over her, and whispering to her words of joy, of hopefulness.

It was at this moment Randle Hilliard, who had witnessed his children at a distance hurrying to the convent, had followed them, entered the apartment.

The sight which presented itself was one for which he was wholly unprepared ; he staggered back as if paralyzed. He saw at a glance, in the features of the Sister of Charity, those of his wife ; of that proud beautiful Clare Day, whom he had so fondly, passionately adored with all the fervor of first love. Beautiful indeed, the features still there, but pride had given place to a heavenly placidity ; a sweet and gentle meekness which bore no vestige of that taint, which, if it had done aught, had detracted from, rather heightened her acknowledged loveliness.

Had he been alone he would have fled from her as though she had been a spirit of evil ; but she was not alone, she was literally in the arms of his—and hers—for that fact was one which it was not in his power to ignore ; and it was necessary that he should take cognizance of it, as a prelude to those steps which should once more effect a reconciliation never more to be thus broken in upon.

Before he had time to recover from the shock of the sudden meeting, his native pride came to his assistance, and forbade his making a scene ; his

innate principles of justice and of honor made him remember that his worse charge against his wife was simply a suspicion, which might be unworthy of him ; his quick glance at her garb suggested to him that during her self-imposed absence she had not wronged his honor nor brought shame to their children, for it was plain that she had lived a secluded life, save where the duties of her order, whose habit she wore, took her among the poor, sick and helpless.

He approached the silent yet deeply excited group, and said, "I recognize you ; it is for you to say in what terms, and under what circumstances I am to address you ? "

Mrs. Hilliard pressed her hands together, and with a burst of intense emotion she said :

"Randle, I have been true to you in every womanly relation ! I most solemnly vow this, or if 'twas not so, I should fall dead at the feet of my children."

They closed around her, and Ryle said with emphasis, as though the words sprung from the depths of his heart :

"Mother, I do believe you ! "

"Clare, I do believe in your truth—I have foully wronged you. Can you, will you pardon and forgive me ? "

She was the next moment locked in his strong embrace.

The coldness of years, the anguish of the terrible past, all seemed banished in that one action.

On both sides there was much to relate. He said pointing to his wife's attire :

"This habit you wear, Clare? Are my newly awakened hopes of future happiness to be crushed, by the information that you have taken the vows of the order in which you are habited?"

"No! Randle, I did not take any vows, but at the advice of the Mother Superior, I wore this habit as a protection while a boarder at the convent."

Randle Hilliard was well satisfied with the answer. And nothing remained for Mrs. Hilliard to do, but to return to the position she had voluntarily quitted; but it was arranged that no public acknowledgment of her restoration to her friends should be made until they knew that they were free from the plottings of Madam Vistula.

The return to the Hilliard mansion was in many respects a happy one, and in about a week they all went down to Hilliard Hall, to live in retirement for awhile and wait further developments of the madam's plottings.

Leonore, desirous of avoiding Jerry Menton, gave

up her apartment on the east side of the city, and taking Eva with her, started one night for Letton cottage. Leanore thought she would at least for awhile be safe from all plotters and plottings.

Ryle had given up all hopes of finding Eva. The Hilliard family had been at the hall a few days when one morning the temptation overcame Ryle to visit once more the Letton cottage, where he had spent so many happy hours. As he neared the cottage he was surprised to see signs of life; it was his first impulse to turn off down one of the side paths, when his attention was attracted by the vision of a young girl bending over a rose-bush. He hesitated but a moment, and with a rapid step he approached the rose garden; could his senses have taken flight? Or had the past few months been a horrible dream?

Eva, who had turned at his approach, looked more beautiful, as she stood there in her utter amazement, with her glorious eyes fixed upon him, than he had ever seen her. Robed in a snowy white dress and her hand filled with roses, what a sight for a man who had just passed through the trials that Ryle had.

“Eva! are you a vision or are you really flesh and blood?” said Ryle advancing a few steps.

“Ryle!” cried Eva extending her hand.

Another moment Ryle had her clasped in his arms.

“Eva! at last, at last, never shall we be separated by land or water again.”

“But your people, Ryle——”

“Will receive my beautiful bride just as soon as my darling will consent, and they will be proud of Ryle’s lovely wife——”

“Perhaps,” said a voice at their side. “Let your people receive her first as Eva Letton, and then you may talk of receiving her as your wife——”

“And they will, Leonore Letton,” for it was she who spoke. “My dear mother and sisters will call upon her, and be proud to do so,” answered Ryle.

On the morning following the meeting of Eva and Ryle, the occupants of the hall and the cottage were thrown into great surprise; the morning papers had brought the news of the arrest by Inspector Byrnes, of a notorious gang of murderers and thieves. Two men, one Jerry Menton, and the other Wolf Scrubb would both be tried for double murder, and the others for offenses which would imprison them for life.

There were two, however, who had escaped by taking their own lives. So the paper stated. What a thrill went tingling through Randle Hilliard’s veins as he read. San Juan Alzemora, a Spaniard.

and Madam Vistula Morelia, rather than be taken by the officers terminated their own miserable lives by taking a powder which operated with such rapidity that they were dead in a few minutes. It was the wonderful disclosures and clues that a man by the name of Ureas Morelia gave to the inspector which terminated in such a wholesale capture. The paper gave all the particulars regarding the vile plotting of the madam, and the names of all those who were her assistants, but withheld the names of those who were her victims.

Once more the Hilliards were free. Randle Hilliard came out of the crucible a changed man. Ryle felt now was his opportunity to tell his father, mother, and sisters of his meeting Eva at the cottage, and his great desire of their visiting Eva, to assure her that they would be most pleased to welcome her as their daughter and sister.

“Ryle, my son,” said his father, “you have my blessing, it shall be as you wish.”

“And my blessing also,” cried his mother.

While his sisters gave exclamations of joy.

Happy was Ryle.

Eva had scarcely recovered from the excitement of what she had read that morning in the papers, when the Hilliard carriage drove up to the cottage,

and she saw the whole family alight. She fled to her own room to calm herself for the meeting with Ryle's friends.

In a few moments she entered the parlor, and received her guests with such sweet queenly grace that all were struck at her beauty. Mrs. Hilliard could not help exclaiming, "Where have I seen that face before?"

"I will tell you, madam; you have seen the same features in Remington Temple; you know his father disinherited him because he married a farmer's daughter. But Eva is now the possessor of her grandfather's immense wealth as he has just died.

Eva could now enter the proud hall of the Hilliards as an equal as to birth and wealth.

How proud Ryle was of his Eva now. The day was set for the wedding. Landon returned to join in the grand wedding festivities.

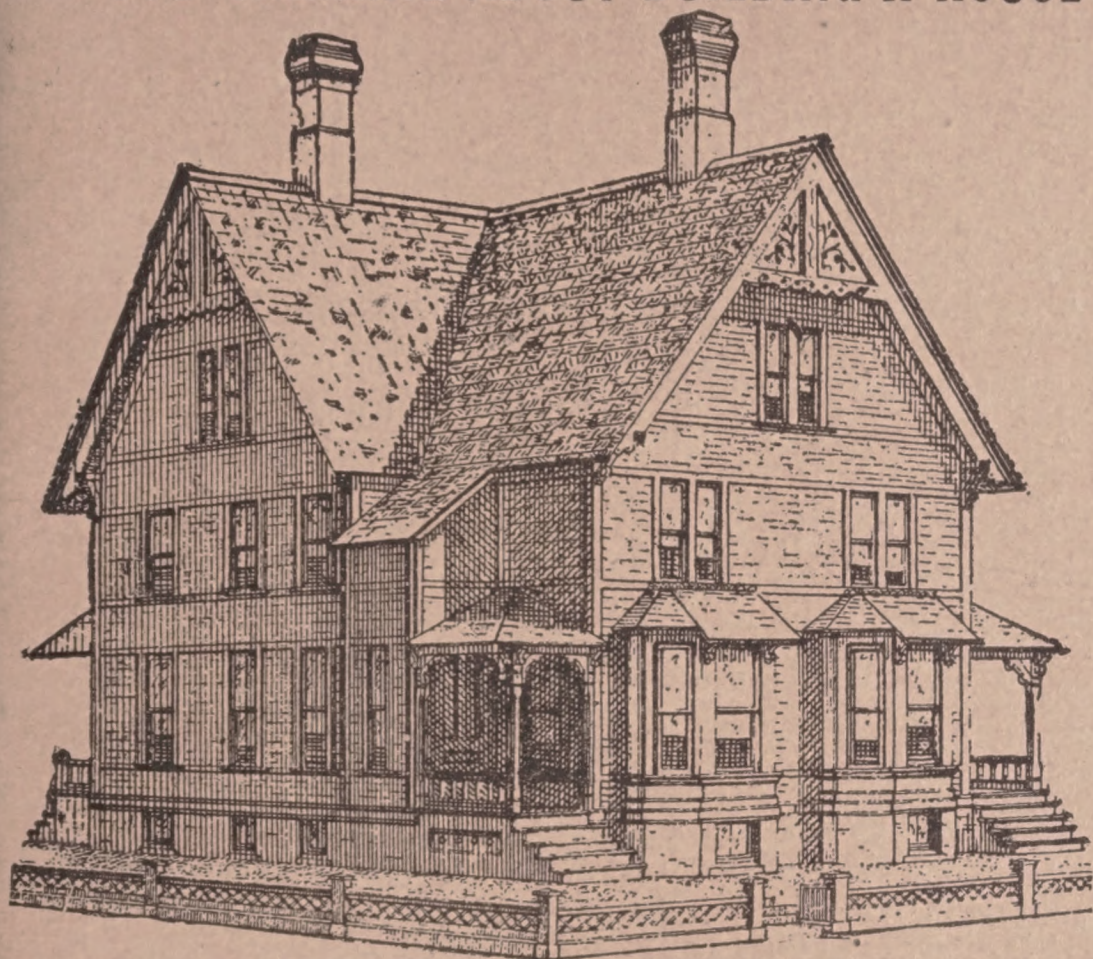
Leonore was provided with a handsome sum for life.

Clare and Daisy soon married two estimable young men.

And now if you go to Hilliard Hall you will see Ryle's and Eva's children gamboling over the hills and dales there where their father and mother first learned to love each other.

THE END.

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